

## **Gender Justice and Partnership Guidelines**

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*Act justly;  
Love tenderly;  
And walk humbly with your God.  
[Micah 6:8]*

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We work with women in the fields. They tell their stories of how hard they work, how hard it is to feed their children. Their husbands keep their earnings and spend it on liquor. Of the 27 members of the Women's Farmers Cooperative, one hundred percent were battered.

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*Filipino Participant,  
Aurora Conference\**

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The *Every Woman with her Documents* campaign assists a rural woman in Brazil to create her own civil identity – to ensure her a named and secure place in her society; to be a full citizen.

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*Brazilian Participant,  
Aurora Conference*

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### **1.0 "Gender Justice and Partnership" is an approach that we must weave into all aspects of our work...**

We believe that the gift of Jesus Christ and the call of the Gospel is to honest, just and transparent relationships with God, with one another, and with creation.

Within the churches' responsibility to promote systemic justice, the struggle for gender justice is one of the most fundamental ways in which we seek to transform structures and systems in order to be faithful to God's vision for humanity and creation as revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We live in a world broken by poverty, systemic and domestic violence and oppressive patriarchal structures. These realities, which are magnified by the effects of globalization, take root even in our churches. Globally, the majority of people in the world are denied justice and access to decision-making and power, denying them the fullness of life. The injustices that result from this brokenness impact most heavily on women.

There are signs of hope in stories of survival, struggle, resistance and courage. We have experienced the initiative and creativity that women bring to this struggle for wholeness and life. These stories come from around the globe.

*This is our kairos – the time to commit ourselves and to act for*

gender justice.

## 2.0 We are...

The Division of World Outreach (DWO) of The United Church of Canada (UCC). Our mandate is to facilitate the involvement of the whole United Church of Canada in *global partnership*. By this we mean sharing in God's mission with partner churches and agencies in other parts of the world.

DWO work has four foci:

- Deepen our understanding of "partnership"
- Enable people-to-people exchanges
- Work on issues of systemic justice
- Integrate "partnerships" into the life of The United Church of Canada

We are committed to promoting the five aims of the *Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women in Church and Society*:

- To empower women to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their country and their church;
- To affirm, through shared leadership and decision making, the decisive contribution of women in churches and communities;
- To give visibility to women's perspectives and actions in the work and struggles for justice, peace and the integrity of creation;
- To enable the churches to free themselves from racism, sexism, and classism and from teachings and practices that discriminate against women;
- To encourage the churches to take action in solidarity with women.

We are also committed to applying the *Ecumenical Sharing of Resources Guidelines* of the World Council of Churches. Known as the *El Escorial* agreement (after the location of the meeting in El Escorial, Spain), the guidelines call participating churches to values that promote or contribute to:

- The justice, peace and integrity of creation;
- Shared decision-making;

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A Community of Gifts... God calls us to be in partnership so that we can share the gifts each of us has with one another. These gifts are freely given by God for the benefit of all.

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*A Journey Together for Abundant Life, DWO 1997*

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- Sensitivity to different cultures;
- The importance of non-monetary resources that those without money bring to partnerships;
- The participation of women and youth in decision-making;
- The identification with the struggles of those who suffer from injustice;
- Work towards enabling self-reliance and self-determination in partners;
- Mutual accountability in the use of resources;
- Ecumenical sharing of resources at all levels (national, regional and international);
- Wholeness in mission.

### 3.0 *We have a history...*

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*Sounding the Bamboo* is a UCC bi-annual event for racial/ethnic minority (REM) women. REM women come together to open their hearts and minds, to share their experiences, to learn from one another and to celebrate their gifts of uniqueness. The conferences both acknowledge the beauty of difference and empower women to create change through solidarity. Their Mission Statement, "We, United Church Women from diverse racial ethno-cultures, congregate to affirm our faith and our ministries", indicates the commitment to affirming spirituality through different cultural heritages.

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*Sounding the Bamboo III,*  
*Ethnic Ministries Council,*  
*1997*

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*Of* challenging systems and structures that discriminate against women in church and society and of working toward the creation of an inclusive community.

As church (The United Church of Canada), some of the important milestones for us include:

- In 1936 The United Church of Canada ordained a woman for the first time. By 1995, women were 32% of the members of the Order of Ministry.
- In 1963, the UCC approved the recommendations of a report, *Married Women Working*. These included encouraging Conferences and presbyteries to push the government to provide good, trustworthy day-care homes and day nurseries and to urge provincial governments to enact legislation giving women an adequate minimum wage and equal pay for equal work.
- In 1984 the UCC acknowledged that all sexism in language, in social and economic structures, and in attitudes is destructive to human dignity and opposed to the will of God. We confessed the church's complicity in sexism and committed ourselves to addressing sexism in church life and to stand in solidarity with those who confront sexism.
- In 1988 the UCC declared that sexual orientation, in and of itself, would not be a criterion for determining eligibility for ordination and commissioning.
- In 1988 the UCC embraced the goals of the World Council of Churches *Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity*

*with Women in Church and Society.*

- In 1992 the UCC approved a strongly worded new policy on sexual abuse and harassment.

As the Division of World Outreach, we have adopted a number of strategies and practices to address issues of systemic injustice toward women, while honouring long-standing partnerships.

Some of these strategies include:

- Listening carefully to the stories of women, including both their struggles and hopes.
- Direct support to women's programs and organizations, as well as training programs for women.
- Ensuring some balance in receiving women as well as men from partner organizations when inviting partners to Canada.
- Seeking to employ women in all salary categories within DWO.
- Providing financial and logistical support for networking among women and for exchange visits of women throughout the world.

We confess that despite our history of challenging injustice, we continue to struggle with sexism within our own structures. Our journey toward wholeness, therefore, calls us to ongoing repentance and renewal. It challenges us to create policies and practices that promote the inclusion of the marginalized, particularly women.

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Through the exchange with Connie Mabusela and Nangula Kathindi, we came to realize that the people "over there" are the people "over here". We really are partners together on a journey. The recognition of one another as part of a global family where we embrace each other's differences was our Emmaus Road. Resurrection happens when people meet face to face.

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*Joan Cook,*

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*Canadian participant in the*

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*Newfoundland/Africa  
exchange, summer, 1997*

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#### **4.0 We are providing these Guidelines because...**

We believe it is important to articulate—in a clear and concise manner—what we feel are the basic principles and practices that should guide our work and witness as members of the universal church and as partners in God's mission.

Women and men around the world have challenged us to name our beliefs and to state our commitment, as expressed by the 35th General Council of The United Church of Canada, "...to continue journeying toward the *shalom* vision when men and women, girls and boys, live in justice and peace together."

We also believe that as the *Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women in Church and Society* draws to a close, the aims and accomplishments of this 10-year process need to be celebrated and carried forward in our work and mission.

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Love, peace, justice, caring, healing, grace and truth are words we use daily. The Decade's call is for churches to live this out.

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*Mercy Oduyoye,*

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*“Who Will Roll the Stone  
Away”, WCC, 1990*

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We understand gender justice to be one aspect of a comprehensive understanding of justice in all human and institutional relationships—that gender justice is linked to issues of class, race, sexual orientation, age, ability, ecology, ethnicity and global economic justice—and that this subject needs to be addressed in that context.

### **5.0 *These Guidelines ARE...***

- An articulation of how the DWO seeks to strengthen relationships with its Canadian and global partners, specifically in promoting gender justice.
- A resource to help the DWO engage in a dialogue with partners on how to develop goals and strategies that promote gender justice.
- A statement of the DWO understanding of and commitment to gender justice.
- A guide that encourages mutual accountability with which we can measure our progress toward ensuring gender justice.

### **6.0 *These Guidelines ARE NOT...***

- A formal policy to be imposed on global partners.
- A rigid framework to define our beliefs and actions.
- A set of criteria to make funding decisions about existing partnerships.

### **7.0 *These Guidelines will be used to...***

*Provide direction for the staff and decision-making bodies of DWO. We also offer them as a resource for other groups within The United Church of Canada.*

*We also see these Guidelines as something that will provide a focus for dialogue with people and groups in Canada and overseas as we engage in the process of mutual discovery of what it means to be “partners” in the quest for gender justice.*

### **8.0 *Our commitment to Gender Justice is rooted in our***

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Let us welcome the Spirit,  
letting ourselves go in her wild  
rhythm of life.

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*Chung Hyun Kyung*

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*faith...*

We have seen and heard the harsh and oppressive reality facing women and girls the world over. This oppression is structural and systemic. It forms part of the system of domination that subjugates by class, race, age, ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, geographic regions, and other factors. Violence on all levels destroys women's lives.

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Joy is our banquet.

*Keri Wehlander*

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*In* the destruction of the lives of the “Comfort Women” of World War II and millions of exploited Asian women today, we hear again the story of the murder of Jephtha's daughter. In the clamour of the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza del Mayo in Argentina, we hear Rachel still weeping for her children. In the enslavement of African women's futures to foreign monetary powers, we remember the enslavement of the Hebrew women in Egypt. In the striving of the St. Columba House women (Montreal, Canada) against systems that deny their rights, we hear again Jesus' story of the unjust judge and the widow's struggle to receive justice.

*In* the face of this violence and oppression God stands with those who suffer and speaks a resounding “No” to structures and systems which destroy human lives and earth community. God calls us to a world of shalom, where justice prevails and peace flourishes.

We know that God requires of us “*to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our God*”. (Micah 6:8). In the dignity and resistance of women the world over, in their quest for justice, we are inspired by Hannah and Mary and the promise of the time when God will have:

*“...brought down the powerful from their thrones, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, and the rich sent empty away.”*  
(Luke 1:52,53).

*Therefore*, within the churches' responsibility to promote systemic justice, the struggle for gender justice is one of the most fundamental ways in which we seek to transform systems and structures. The church is called to this vision of radical justice as reflected in the World Council of Churches Unit IV (Sharing and Service) guidelines:

"The Church of Jesus Christ belongs to women and men. Our vision recognizes the full humanity of women together with men as people of God called to work for dignity and genuine community based on love, understanding and right relationships. It is a vision of restoring and enriching community and family/home life by enabling men and women to be an integral part of a whole. It also requires understanding of Biblical message through the eyes and experience of women and men in church and society."

"We need to uplift Jesus' relationship to women and men as a model and dare to become a community of men and women in equal partnership. Our different experiences and traditions can become a resource in this search for the full humanity of women and men and the renewal of creation. The church also needs to be involved as a healing community. In this context the participation of women in the different ministries of the church is something that empowers them rather than subordinates them; when women are empowered so is the whole community—friendships and inclusivity are reinforced as well."

Throughout history, the church has been enriched by the witness and leadership of women. However, the church has often failed to embrace the gift of community that is ours in Christ. It has used its power as an institution to control liturgy, the interpretation of scripture, and access to leadership roles to reinforce the oppression of women. We need to repent of the ways in which the church participates in and sustains patriarchal structures that suppress women and keep them from fully sharing their God-given gifts in community.

We believe that God's Spirit is alive and dynamic, sustaining those who struggle for justice and enabling transformation to occur. We trust that God is with all of us as we discern how to strengthen our work for gender justice.

***9.0 Our mandate and theological perspective give rise to certain principles and practices that we value and uphold...***

**Partnership** means becoming involved with others in God's mission for wholeness of life, especially with those who suffer from systems of injustice. Partnership brings people together in community for mutual empowerment through the sharing of gifts. We believe that movement toward a more just, participatory society will be fostered through the building of relationships of respect, and the sharing of resources, experiences and values among people. We acknowledge the need for mutual accountability, trust, honesty, forgiveness and persistent love, which requires long-term commitments.

**Resource Sharing** acknowledges that all are called to participate in God's mission. Resources must be shared to enable that mission to take place. We uphold the just sharing of resources, recognizing their variety (human, financial, material) and that we alone do not control the resources we have for God's mission. The UCC is one partner among many in God's mission in the world. We are committed to applying the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources Guidelines (*El Escorial*) of the World Council of Churches.

**Systemic Justice** works for the transformation of the systems and organizations which structure our communities. Injustice, at its heart, is organized, institutionalized and systemic. But social, cultural, political and economic systems can be changed so that no groups or individuals have unfair advantages over others. The struggle for systemic justice calls us to continually challenge fields of power so that all people are enabled to control and transform the conditions of their lives.

**Empowerment/Capacity Building** is about people taking control over their own lives, gaining skills, increasing self-confidence, solving problems and participating in decision making. The capacity to act in the face of systemic oppression is shaped, constrained and enabled by social structures. We believe that God works through people to build social movements of resistance to this oppression. We are committed to supporting the processes of change through which people and groups can address injustices, renegotiate power, and advance goals for a more just world.

**Building Sustainable Communities** offers the vision of healthy communities as the foundation of a just and peaceful world. This vision centres around the meaning of *shalom*, a biblical word which encompasses peace, shelter, well being, justice, harmony, healthy working environments and a stable ecosystem. To be concerned for

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We are working on empowerment strategies. Women do not want to be just a part of income earning projects but want to have control over their own income earning projects.

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*Indian participant,*

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*Aurora Conference*

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healthy communities draws us into consideration of the neighbour and the question of who is included and who is excluded. We are committed to working for inclusive communities in which all people are welcome and diversity is celebrated.

*Whole World Ecumenism* yearns for the healing of creation. It calls the church beyond its traditional relationships to make common cause with people of good will throughout the world who are committed to compassion, peace and justice. This model of ecumenism returns the understanding of *oikoumene* (the household of God) to that of the whole inhabited earth. In a world at risk, the church must both deepen its existing partnerships throughout the world and seek out new forms of relationship for the sake of the healing of God's creation.

### **10.0 *The phrase "gender justice and partnership" has a specific meaning for us...***

#### **Gender**

We use the word "*gender*" to define a concept that is fundamental to our understanding of human relationships.

"Gender refers to the roles that society defines for women and men, boys and girls. Sex roles, in contrast, refer to the biological function of being male and female. Gender roles are passed on by tradition, religious beliefs/interpretations and the value system of a community. They become institutionalized in social practices, ideas and relationships and become ingrained in the consciousness of both men and women. They are learned and therefore can be unlearned" (WCC).

An example of the difference between gender roles and sex roles is that women biologically can become pregnant, not men. On the other hand, a socially constructed role (gender role) is the idea, common to many cultures, that childcare is women's work. The fact that women give birth to children does not necessarily mean that they alone should take on the responsibility for childcare. Men, too, can be nurturing and take care of children as can be seen in the practice of some tribal societies.

#### **Gender Justice**

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For 20 years the mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared have walked around the Plaza de Mayo. They began walking during the days of the dictatorship as a means of searching for their daughters and sons who had disappeared. After all this time they have not lost hope. They are a symbol of the search for justice—willing us to remember and also to work for change.

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*Argentinean Participant,*

*Aurora Conference*

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Simply defining what we mean by "gender" is not enough. We are conscious that gender roles are located within a larger system of power relations and that our commitment must be extended to include the struggle for "*gender justice*".

"Most often there is an imbalance of power in favour of men resulting from giving more opportunities to men and placing constraints on women. Discrimination against women is culturally entrenched and global." (WCC)

We understand "patriarchy" to be a violent system of domination in which women, children and creation are subordinate and in which men are granted privilege because they are men. Patriarchy has been perpetuated throughout human history through the institutionalization of domination in the social, cultural and religious practices of societies.

*Patriarchy* is legitimized through the media and political, legal, economic and education systems. Patriarchy is so complex, with its inter-playing factors of sex, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, ability, ethnicity, religion, that it encircles women and men in its exploitative, discriminatory and oppressive control. Patriarchy prevents both men and women from being fully human.

"Gender justice" analyzes relationships between men and women, particularly those relationships that are oppressive. It looks at how these relationships are affected by other factors, such as class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The ultimate goal of gender justice is to support the creation (or strengthening) of transformative, non-oppressive relationships, which we believe to be expressive of the Reign of God.

### **Partnership and Gender Justice**

For us, *gender justice* cannot exist outside of our understanding of *partnership*. The DWO is committed to work at mutuality and equality in our relationships with partners. We acknowledge the power imbalance that results from unequal access to resources (especially financial resources) and therefore strive to relate to one another as people who have different but equally valuable gifts to share. We are committed to the struggle to redress existing power

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I believe that limitless horizons  
lie before my daughter, not just  
a few traditional choices.

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*Rene Parmar*

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imbalances in the world. Because we see gender injustice as something that exists in all cultures we want to be engaged with global partners in a mutual struggle to promote gender justice. We have much to learn about this problem that faces all of us, perhaps in different ways and to different degrees.

### ***11.0 Weaving "Gender Justice and Partnership" into our work calls for a series of Commitments and Action Steps...***

Keeping in mind the various initiatives and strategies that have already been launched, our commitments will be carried out in the following manner:

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In Hebrew, this work is called 'Tikkun Olam'—repairing the world. Rabbinic tradition states that the work is not ours to finish, but neither are we free to take no part in it.

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*Canadian Participant,*

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*Aurora Conference*

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***1.0 We commit*** ourselves to using our gender justice and partnership analysis as a "lens" through which we will examine and evaluate current and future educational programs, programs with a thematic foci and people to people programs of the Division of World Outreach, ***through:***

- 1.1 Establishing a "Gender Justice Monitoring Committee" as a standing committee within DWO.
- 1.2 Developing a set of tools and resources, e.g. an evaluation tool/grid, that uses these *Gender Justice and Partnership* Guidelines to examine the work of DWO.

***2.0 We commit*** ourselves to ensuring that human and financial resources explicitly support those who are socially, economically, geographically or culturally marginalized, particularly women, ***through:***

- 2.1 Initiating in partner relationships the question of how gender justice and empowerment of women (of all ages) is being enabled through the partnership.
- 2.2 Providing appropriate resources so that staff with divisional representatives can make this conversation a priority in intentional visits to partners.
- 2.3 Making it a priority to share resources in every country where partnerships exist to support programs and initiatives aimed at the empowerment of women.

***3.0 We commit*** ourselves to seek mutual engagement between

DWO and partners on the commitments of Gender Justice and Partnership, *through:*

- 3.1 Sharing these Guidelines with global partners and inviting them to comment on both our gender analysis and our practice of doing gender justice.
- 3.2 Ensuring that our engagement with partners on gender justice is consistent with our understanding of partnership.
- 3.3 Specifically invite each partner to share with the DWO their current understanding and practice of gender justice, including tools and resources they have developed.
- 3.4 Offering, where appropriate, specific resources and contacts to support partners in their gender justice work.

**4.0** *We commit* ourselves to facilitating linkages between women throughout the world particularly with and among partner churches and organizations, with a focus especially on marginalized women, *through:*

- 4.1 Providing logistical and financial resources to help link women on current thematic issues.
- 4.2 Ensuring gender justice in the allocation of scholarship resources.
- 4.3 Ensuring gender justice for the selection of overseas visitors to Canada and Canadian visitors overseas.

**5.0** *We commit* ourselves to raising our gender justice analysis in the various groups and organizations to which the Division of World Outreach relates, *through:*

- 5.1 Distributing these Guidelines to all committees, groups and organizations to which DWO relates.
- 5.2 Assisting those who represent DWO at other fora to understand the content and implications of the *Gender Justice and Partnership* Guidelines.

**6.0** *We commit* ourselves to seeking out and promoting ways in which the aims of the *Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women in Church and Society* can be extended into the future, *through:*

- 6.1 Receiving and acting on the recommendations of the end of the Decade report of the World Council of Churches.
- 6.2 Helping to gather and distribute analysis and stories of women's experiences (both opportunities and challenges).
- 6.3 Explore ways to encourage men to be involved in gender justice issues.

**7.0** *We commit* ourselves to promoting and facilitating the development and deepening of a gender justice analysis within our own structures and also with the partners to which we relate, *through:*

- 7.1 Organizing regular training/formation sessions on gender justice for all staff in the Division of World Outreach, including overseas personnel.
- 7.2 Providing opportunities for gender training and formation for DWO volunteers.
- 7.3 Ensuring that funds within each Area are available to support partners' initiatives in exploring gender issues and promoting gender justice.

**8.0** *We commit* ourselves to offering these Guidelines to The United Church of Canada, *through:*

- 8.1 Distributing these Guidelines to the General Council Executive, General Council Divisions, Conferences and other appropriate Committees.

## ***12.0 Checking Our Progress...***

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Gender Justice is the work of the whole church—men and women together. Men must participate equally in the struggle for wholeness.

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*Aurora Consultation*

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*Our* commitment to weave our *Gender Justice and Partnership* analysis into our ongoing work requires us to monitor and evaluate our progress. As part of our accountability (to ourselves, to this process, and to global partners), we have established a number of means and reporting mechanisms for checking our progress. An outline of how we propose to do this is contained in the following pages of this document.

## ***13.0 A Work in Progress...***

**We** regard these Guidelines as a work in progress and are committed to continuing the dialogue with global partners as we search for ways to promote gender justice.

**Just** as these Guidelines will guide our actions, so will the learning from these actions and feedback from global partners guide our refinement of the Guidelines in the years ahead.

**By** God's grace we rejoice in this opportunity to join with global partners and other people of good will as we seek to "act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God" in the shaping of God's *Shalom*.

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*\* The Aurora Consultation was a four-day gathering held in February, 1998 at a conference centre in Aurora, Ontario, Canada. The thirty participants included nine overseas partners, members of the United Church from across Canada, and several staff from the Division of World Outreach and other Divisions of The United Church of Canada. They discussed, prayed, and celebrated together. This document is the result of their work, which was revised and then approved by the Annual Meeting of the Division of World Outreach on February 9, 1998.*