

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS ABOUT EQUITY AND SELF-DETERMINATION

### *A note about terminology:*

This glossary is not a comprehensive list of all terms that exist related to equity and self-determination. Rather, this glossary is designed to support participants at this year's General Council with some key terms that may be used throughout the meeting.

Terminology in this area is constantly changing and evolving—and so what works now, in 2022, may not work as well in a few years. Language can also be an imperfect descriptor of complex concepts related to identity. Still, the hope is that this glossary may be helpful for participant processes and engagement throughout General Council.

The terms are listed in alphabetical order under the following broad categories:

- [Disabilities](#)
- [Gender identity and sexual orientation](#)
- [Indigenous justice](#)
- [Intercultural engagement](#)
- [Race and racism](#)

### DISABILITIES

**Disability:** Almost 3.8 million Canadians (about 14 percent of the population) identify as having a disability. It is often described as a physical or mental condition that can limit a person's movements, senses, or activities. A disability may be present at birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time.

A disability may be physical, medical (like epilepsy or addictions), sensory, developmental, cognitive, related to learning, a condition of mental impairment, a mental disorder, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language. Disabilities can be both visible and invisible.

Understandings of disability change over time—and therefore, defining disability is a complex, evolving matter. Conditions such as Crohn's disease or chronic fatigue syndrome, for example, are now considered disabilities but would not have been several years ago. Disability can also be dynamic. It is an elastic category—an open minority—that anyone can join at any time, with the likelihood of joining increasing with age.

[The Canadian government has often advocated for “people-first” language](#), which emphasizes putting the person first and the disability second: for example, saying a person with a spinal cord injury, or a person with a history of depression. Many disabled people, however, say the disability is not inside of the person: one is not a “person with a disability.” Rather the naming

*Sources:* The United Church of Canada ([united-church.ca](http://united-church.ca) and [commons.united-church.ca](https://commons.united-church.ca)); Cracking Open White Identity: Towards Transformation (The Canadian Council of Churches); That All May Be One: A Resource for Educating toward Racial Justice (The United Church of Canada).

should be of a “[disabled person](#)”—that is, [someone who is disabled by a world that is not equipped to allow them to participate and flourish](#). To learn about preferences for naming some suggestions are to: include a reference to person, avoid broad groupings such as “the disabled,” and listen to people about personal preferences.

**Mental illness:** A disability that affects about one in five Canadians. It includes living with depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, or being bi-polar, all of which can be invisible or have visible effects. Although mental illness can be treated effectively, there is stigma and discrimination related to mental illness that creates barriers to diagnosis, treatment, and acceptance in the community. Some people and organizations also refer to mental illness as a disorder.

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## GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

**Cisgender:** A term that describes individuals whose gender identity is the same as the sex the person was assigned at birth.

**Gender/gender identity:** A social construct that differs from culture to culture. It is a self-determined identity that reflects an individual's personal understanding of gender in regard to one's own embodied experiences.

**Queer:** This term was used historically as an insult to Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ peoples, but members of the community have since begun reclaiming it. The term can also be used as an affirmative political and/or identity statement.

**Sex:** Gender and sex have often been used interchangeably, despite them having different meanings. At birth, people are usually assigned sexes based on their sex characteristics (such as genitals or chromosomes).

**Sexual orientation** (also known as sexuality): Refers to a person's emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and sexual attraction.

**Trans/transgender:** An umbrella term whose meaning remains in flux. The term is used to refer to a person who has a gender identity that is different from the sex the person was assigned at birth, and/or expresses their gender in ways that differ from societal expectations for a binary of men and women. Trans people may identify with any sexual orientation. "Trans" is often used as a substitute for "transgender," to include people of a wider variety of gender identities who may not feel comfortable adopting the term "transgender."

**Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+:** An acronym used to denote identities of individuals and groups; can be understood to be inclusive of people who identify as Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender/transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual. This acronym is often changing and evolving, which is why in some contexts a common phrase is "people of all sexual orientations and gender identities."

**Two-Spirited or Two-Spirit:** Indigenous Peoples who fulfill one of many mixed or cross-gender roles found traditionally. A direct translation of the Ojibwe term Niizh manidoowag, Two-Spirited or Two-Spirit is usually used to indicate a person whose body simultaneously houses a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit. Not all Indigenous Peoples, however, are comfortable using this term. People who are non-Indigenous cannot self-identify as Two-Spirit.

Additional terms about gender and sexuality are listed in an excerpt from The United Church of Canada resource [Celebrating Gender Diversity: A Toolkit on Gender Identity and Trans Experiences for Communities of Faith](#), 2019 edition.

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## INDIGENOUS JUSTICE

**Free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC):** This refers to the right of Indigenous Peoples to be fully involved, as equal partners, in decision-making on issues that affect Indigenous Peoples and the territories of Indigenous Peoples. FPIC is a process in which Indigenous Peoples are fully informed, in advance, of plans for a project or development; are fully involved in consultations; and are free of coercion in the decision-making process, including any process of accommodation that might arise.

**Indigenous Peoples:** Refers to peoples who have inhabited territories since before the arrival of colonizers. In the last 20 years Indigenous Peoples worldwide have increasingly chosen this identity rather than the term “Aboriginal,” which is considered colonial language. In Canada, “Aboriginal” is still used in the constitutional context; however, most jurisdictions are moving toward “Indigenous.” There are three distinct groups of Indigenous Peoples in Canada: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; there are cultural and linguistic differences among and within each of these groups. This diversity is one reason why the term “Indigenous Peoples” (with an “s”) is used rather than “Indigenous People.”

**Nation to nation relationships:** Relationships of equity, mutuality, and respect between states (such as Canada) and individual Indigenous nations. Such relationships existed in the very early days of Canada’s colonization, and were articulated in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and treaty-making, but were abandoned in the colonial quest for land and resources, Confederation, and an official policy of assimilation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has called for a return to nation-to-nation relationships.

**United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP):** An international human rights instrument drafted by Indigenous Peoples and adopted by the United Nations in 2007. At that time, Canada was one of four nations to abstain from adopting the Declaration. Canada changed its mind in November 2010, stating that it recognized the Declaration as an “aspirational document.” In 2016, Canada announced that it would fully implement the Declaration, and in 2021, the federal government passed Bill C-15, which seeks to implement UNDRIP in Canadian law. Adoption of UNDRIP was a key recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and was directed also to the corporate sector and the churches. The United Church has adopted the Declaration and continues to be engaged in implementing it.

The UNDRIP does not grant any special or new rights to Indigenous Peoples, nor does it prioritize the rights of Indigenous Peoples over any other human rights. It simply codifies the collective and individual rights that Indigenous Peoples have always held, including the rights to self-determination; participation in decision-making; spiritual identity; land and resources; free prior, and informed consent; and freedom from discrimination.

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## INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

**Bias:** An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment.

**Equity:** Equality refers to the practice of treating everyone the exactly same, no matter what identities they hold.

Equity, however, is different. Equity takes into account that due to the systemic discrimination that exists in society, not everyone starts in the same place. Equity realizes that in order to ensure fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all peoples, we need to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some people and groups—particularly people from marginalized communities. Equity does *not* mean treating everyone the same without regard for individual differences (and societal inequalities). Equity moves closer to justice, and it is part of the work of the whole church.

**Equity aspirations:** Equity aspirations are a practical tool for working toward our long-term goals around equity. They are a tool for approaching meetings, conversations, and report preparation. Equity aspirations invite us to question biases, challenge assumptions, notice who’s missing, value all voices, aim for equity, and live out our commitments (as we strive to live out God’s call). The equity aspirations are listed as part of the workbook for General Council 44, and are also noted in each session.

**Ethnic:** The Canadian government, in its census, still tends to use the term “ethnic” as a reference to the cultural origins of a person’s ancestors. At times, and in different places, the word “ethnic” has been used interchangeably to mean “racialized” when in fact these are different concepts. (The term “racialized” is explained elsewhere in this document.)

In the United Church, the word “ethnic” has been used historically in church documents, but it has recently fallen out of favour. People in the United Church have recently offered considerable critique of the term “ethnic”—this word has its origins in the term “ethnos,” which in turn has roots in the terms “pagan/heathen.” The term “ethnic” is included in this glossary to help make sense of historical documents; however, it is likely not used in many current written materials.

**Intercultural:** Living together with a respectful awareness of each other’s differences. We do this by examining ourselves, building relationships, and distributing power fairly. Becoming an intercultural church is the call to live together in intentional ways where there is the mutual recognition and understanding of difference through self-examination, relationship building, and equitable access to power; it is also our attempt to respond faithfully to such a call. The intercultural commitment is also grounded in other United Church commitments, such as anti-

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racism. As such, work related to anti-racism, and disabilities, is part of the church's intercultural engagement.

**Intercultural vision:** The intercultural vision was adopted by the Executive of General Council (GCE) in October 2012 as part of the report "[Intercultural Ministries: Living into Transformation.](#)" The vision notes that an intercultural church is one that is welcoming, relational, adaptive, justice-seeking, intentional, and missional. A plain language version is available in the [Intercultural Ministries](#) section of the United Church website.

**Power:** The ability to influence or impose one's will on others, even if those others resist. Power itself is not inherently good or bad; it depends on how the power is used. Power is dynamic and not static; not subjective; fluid and not binary; personal and systemic; situational and contextual. Personal power is the power that resides in a person. Systemic or institutional power is given by society based on the position that the person holds.

**Prejudice:** Pre-judgment—an attitude or state of mind that casts another person, either positively or negatively, based on stereotypes or misinformation. Prejudice is not the same as discrimination. Often the two terms are used interchangeably, but they are very different even when they are related. Prejudice is personal. It's about behaviour and personal beliefs, including beliefs that are shaped by wider society. Discrimination is social and structural. It is about which group has power and which does not, and which group has the power to impose its beliefs and preferences.

**Privilege:** Unearned power that gives certain people or groups economic, social, and/or political advantages simply by virtue of their belonging to a dominant identity group in society. People are often unaware of their own privilege.

There are two types of status: ascribed and prescribed. Prescribed status refers to people earning (i.e., by merit or favour). Ascribed status refers to people born into that status. Privilege is an example of ascribed status.

**Systemic or institutional discrimination:** Discrimination is an action or behaviour based on prejudice, manifesting itself in excluding or restricting persons and groups from participation in the community's normal activities; it can only be exercised by a group with more social, economic, or political power over another group. Systemic or institutional discrimination is embedded into the very structures of society and its institutions, noticed in visible effects, experienced subjectively, and often unrecognized by dominant members who benefit most from it.

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## RACE AND RACISM

**Colour-blind:** Refers to the false notion that race does not matter in a social context or that race is neutral in a social context. “Colour-blindness” can keep people from raising concerns about racial inequalities. It can also dismiss the lived experiences of Indigenous and racialized peoples who tend to have regular and ongoing experiences of systemic racism. This is because “colour-blindness” suggests that racism will go away simply if one ignores it, and it pretends that it does not exist.

A “colour-blind” perspective might be expressed as stating something like “I do not see colour” or “We are all just part of the human race” or “All lives matter” when talking about people. In reality, however, very young children notice racial and colour differences in people, and most adults will also notice racial differences. Ignoring racial differences usually does not aid in dismantling racism.

**Race:** Race is a Western social construct; it’s a human creation. It describes a socially defined group seen by others as being distinct by sharing external features such as skin colour, facial or bodily characteristics, hair texture, and/or a common descent. There is no proven scientific basis for such categorization. It’s a powerful, frequently damaging construct. That race is not “scientific” or biological does not make it any less powerful.

**Racialized:** This term is commonly used instead of “racial minority,” “visible minority,” “person of colour,” or “non-White.” The term “racial minority” is one that is not used as much because, while racialized people may have fewer numbers in some parts of Canada, racialized people are not a minority in the world.

The people of the United Church have tended to “racialized” instead of the term “BIPOC” (which is an acronym for “Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour”).

**Racism:** A system of oppression fed by individual and collective attitudes and by actions that discriminate against, oppress, exclude, and limit people on the basis of race and/or the colour of their skin. It is systemic because it has the power to inhibit the realization of the full potential of humanness by those who experience racial discrimination. The struggle to eliminate racism is a justice issue.

### Racism

- is a system of advantage and privilege based on “race,” in which one group of people exercises abusive power over others on the basis of skin colour and racial heritage
- is a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, erroneous assumptions and actions based upon an ideology that accords inherent superiority of one racial or ethnic group over another or others.

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- is measured not by intent but by its effect or impact on those oppressed
- can be “in your face” or hidden; individual or systemic; intentional or unintentional
- gives privilege to, and sustains, the dominant/powerful group
- exists everywhere in our society, including all institutions and the church
- can be acted on personally, but it always refers back to a bigger system of power, privilege, and related inequities

**White privilege:** Unearned power given to White people that gives White people economic, political, social, and cultural advantages. White privilege is an institutional and social set of benefits granted to people who physically resemble the people who dominate the powerful positions in our society and in its institutions. Because of Canada’s historical ties to European empires and to their long process of colonization, people of northern European descent and/or appearance (i.e., White Canadians) have social privileges and power that racialized people and Indigenous peoples do not. The ability to speak English fluently and with a “Canadian” accent is also part of White privilege in the Canadian context.

**Whiteness:** This is a broad cultural category—a way of being—that tends to normalize White racial identities. Whiteness is considered to be “dominant” and can sometimes go on without question. In the Canadian context, people of many racial identities participate in the culture of Whiteness; however, White privilege means that White people are more easily able to navigate and benefit from this culture.

As a category, Whiteness is fluid and changes over time. For example, at one point, some immigrants to Canada from some places within western Europe were not considered to be “White,” whereas more recently, many people from western Europe are included in the category of “Whiteness.”

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