

Remit 1: Study Guide for Category 3 Remit Establishing an Autonomous National Indigenous Organization

As authorized by the 44th General Council, in 2022

Between March 15, 2023 and March 31, 2024, every regional council and each pastoral charge's governing body will be asked to approve an amendment to the Basis of Union of *The Manual* establishing an autonomous Indigenous Church structure. An amendment to the Basis of Union requires a category 3 remit.

There is one question to be voted on, as follows.

Does the regional council/pastoral charge agree to amend the Basis of Union to reflect:

- a. That The United Church of Canada will be organized as follows: (1) a three-council structure, consisting of communities of faith, regional councils and a Denominational Council*; and (2) an autonomous National Indigenous Organization; and
- b. That once the new autonomous National Indigenous Organization is established within The United Church of Canada, it will have its own mechanisms to make any future changes to its structure and processes, and, therefore will not be subject to the remit process under section 7.4.1 of the Basis of Union**; and
- c. The changes required for the establishment of the autonomous National Indigenous Organization.

* The "Denominational Council" and the "General Council" are often used interchangeably.

** The detailed proposed changes to the Basis of Union are listed in a chart on page 5 of this document, under the section heading "Frequently Asked Questions".

What is this remit about?

1. At General Council 44, the National Indigenous Circle asked for the removal of any structural barriers that would prevent the development and sustaining of an autonomous National Indigenous Organization within The United Church of Canada. When any requested change in church structure will alter the Basis of Union of *The Manual*, then a category 3 remit is required. This document is the study guide for this remit.
2. In 2019, General Council 43 approved the creation of a National Indigenous Organization, as a body equivalent to, and having the same power and responsibilities as, a regional council. This is currently reflected in *The Manual* in Section C-NIO.
3. This remit proposes that the already-existing National Indigenous Organization would become autonomous, within The United Church of Canada.
4. The creation of an autonomous National Indigenous Organization within The United Church of Canada would be consistent with the Caretakers of our Indigenous Circle's *Calls to the Church* and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Approval of this remit will enable the Indigenous Church to define its own structure and processes within The United Church of Canada. It acknowledges Indigenous peoples' rights to their own spiritual identities and to self-determination. This has the potential to create a new kind of relationship: in the words of the National Indigenous Council, moving "from 'missions to Indians' ... towards being 'partners in God's call to all the earth.'"

Background

The Idea of a Self-Determining Indigenous Church

5. The idea of a self-determining Indigenous Church has a very long history in The United Church of Canada, dating back to at least the 1960s. From that time until now, Indigenous peoples have been organizing to bring their vision of church to life, whether that was achieving the Apology in 1986 for the church's role in colonization; building Indigenous systems of governance and theological education; or asserting its long-standing call to the church to acknowledge and atone for its actions at residential institutions.
6. The United Church pledged to uphold (among others) the rights to spiritual identity and self-determination in 2016 when it adopted the principles, norms, and standards of the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation as a response to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). The church stated at that time that it was "not sure [of]

what lies ahead,” but that it was committed to “a new identity, a new relationship, and a new way of being” with the Indigenous Church.

Apologies to Indigenous Peoples

7. With the establishment of residential institutions, health care facilities, and missions in the 19th and 20th centuries, and as named in the 1986 Apology, the United Church and its predecessors “confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ, [and] imposed [Western] civilization as a condition of accepting the gospel”.
8. As named in the United Church’s 1998 Apology, as the church continues its long and painful healing journey from its complicity in colonization, we are committed “to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority”. This is an essential component of our intention to become not just a reconciling but also an actively anti-racist church.
9. The United Church’s 1986 Apology, given only after Indigenous peoples called for it, was one way of atoning for the church’s forced assimilation practices and the intentional destruction of Indigenous spiritualities, cultures, and languages. Another way forward came in 2015 with the statement acknowledging the value of Indigenous spiritualities, avowing that “holding both your spirituality and ours is possible through listening and learning with open hearts”. The United Church has also committed to becoming an anti-racist denomination.

The Restructuring of the United Church in 2019

10. In 2019, the Comprehensive Review process was implemented throughout The United Church of Canada. This Comprehensive Review process resulted in substantive changes to the structure of the United Church, including the creation of a three-court model from a four-court model. As a result, the Aboriginal Ministries Council (AMC) began to explore how the Indigenous Church could structure itself within (or alongside) the three-court model of the church created by the Comprehensive Review.
11. The Aboriginal Ministries Council appointed and enabled the Caretakers of Our Indigenous Church to help define this direction, and they did so through a document entitled *Calls to the Church*. This document envisioned a self-determining Indigenous Church founded on Indigenous knowledge and teachings, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and “the desire to live into right relations with a repentant church and pursue the original Indigenous desire for friendship, peace and the strength that comes from respect”.

The Calls to the Church

12. The *Calls to the Church* were accepted at the National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering of the United Church in 2019, and by General Council 43 in its annual meeting that same year. Since then, a new Indigenous governance structure (the National Indigenous Council); the National Indigenous Elders Council; and the Indigenous Office of Vocation have been created alongside the Indigenous Ministries and Justice Unit at the General Council Office to shape and guide the work of self-determination.
13. In July 2022, the National Indigenous Council brought forward General Council 44 Proposal NIC-01, naming its vision of the two parts of the church (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) working side-by-side, and recommending the identification and removal of “all the structural barriers to developing and sustaining an autonomous Indigenous Church within The United Church of Canada”.

Decolonizing our Approach to Structural Changes

14. In our current process, and depending on the type of change that is needed to be made, the Indigenous Church would require a new remit for continued changes to its developing structure. This means that the Indigenous Church would be constantly seeking approval from the rest of the church to make those structural changes. This kind of dynamic—where the Indigenous Church would always be asking for consent from the non-Indigenous church—reflects continued colonial thinking and practices. As named in the United Church’s 1998 Apology, as the church continues its long and painful healing journey from its complicity in colonization, we are committed “to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority”. This is an essential component of our intention to become not just a reconciling but also an actively anti-racist church.
15. The General Secretary’s proposal to General Council 44, GS-10, is an attempt to begin a process of decolonizing our approach to structural change. It is asking for the church to give pre-emptive remit approval for whatever the Indigenous Church determines in the future as the place it will have in the United Church, guided by the *Calls to the Church*—and without the need for further remit approvals.

Frequently Asked Questions

What particular sections of The Manual are proposed to change?

The sections that are proposed to change are all in the Polity section of the Basis of Union. The proposed changes are under the headings of “The Church” (Section 4.2) and “The Denominational Council” (Section 7.4.1).

Current	Proposed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 4.2: The United Church of Canada is organized as a three-council structure, consisting of communities of faith, regional councils and a Denominational Council, as follows. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 4.2 of the Basis of Union will be amended and state: The United Church of Canada is organized as follows: (1) a three-council structure, consisting of communities of faith, regional councils and a Denominational Council; and (2) an autonomous National Indigenous Organization. Section 4.3 will be added to the Basis of Union and state: In its own time and through its own processes, the autonomous National Indigenous Organization will determine its structure and processes. Section 4.4 will be added to the Basis of Union and state: Once the new autonomous National Indigenous Organization is established, it will have its own mechanisms to make any future changes to its structure and processes, and, therefore will not be subject to the remit process under section 7.4.1 of the Basis of Union. Section 4.5 will be added to the Basis of Union and state: The final wording describing the structure and processes of the autonomous National Indigenous Organization will be recorded here.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 7.4.1: changing the Basis of Union—the Basis of Union may only be changed through the remit process, which requires the approval of a majority of the Regional Councils and also, if the Denominational Council considers it advisable because the change is substantive or denomination-shaping, pastoral charges; ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 7.4.1 of the Basis of Union will be amended and state: changing of the Basis of Union—with the exception of section 4.4 (under section II “The Church”), the Basis of Union may only be changed through the remit process, which requires the approval of a majority of the Regional Councils and also, if the Denominational Council considers it advisable because the change is substantive or denomination-shaping, pastoral charges; ...
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What might an autonomous Indigenous Church within The United Church of Canada mean?

The Indigenous Church is asking to develop and sustain an autonomous National Indigenous Organization within The United Church of Canada.

The Caretakers of our Indigenous Circle’s *Calls to the Church* notes that:

“The Indigenous ministries of The United Church of Canada have been about the work of ministry since the beginning in 1925 with roots in the 19th Century work of Methodist and Presbyterian ministries. 2018 marks the 193rd Anniversary of the Grand River Methodist Mission.

“Indigenous people have met regularly over many decades and held deep and ongoing conversations about matters relating to our Indigenous work and our relationship with the United Church. We have been evolving, struggling, adapting and growing since that time and even losing ground too. We do not want to lose the gains we have achieved through the years in any future developments.”

“The UN Declaration [on the Rights of Indigenous People] is about establishing and maintaining respectful relationship, Indigenous self-government, and Indigenous land rights in their traditional territories. This means the Indigenous faith community must exercise a truly Indigenous self-determination and possess a sustainable land-based support.”

The full statement is available on united-church.ca; search “Calls to the Church.”

Can we vote “yes” to some parts of the question in the remit and “no” to other parts?

No. It is not possible to vote for parts (a), (b), and (c) of the remit question separately. The remit is one overall question, broken up in three parts.

Who can I ask questions about this remit?

Please send any questions to remits@united-church.ca, or contact your Regional Council Executive Minister (contact information is available on united-church.ca; search for “Regional Council”).

What is a category 3 remit?

A category 3 remit is required for substantive, denomination-shaping changes to the Basis of Union (*The Manual*, s. F2). A category 3 remit also requires that information and study materials be prepared and sent out with the remit. The proposed change must be sent to the governing body of every pastoral charge and regional council for a vote.

The timeline for information sharing, study, and voting is 12 months.

The General Secretary and the Executive of the General Council are responsible for ensuring the final wording of any change to the Basis of Union is consistent with the by-laws of *The Manual*.

Note: If a regional council or a pastoral charge does not register a vote, that it is considered a vote AGAINST the proposal.

Where can I access additional background information?

The proposals directly related to this remit that were brought to General Council 44 can be accessed through the United Church Commons (commons.united-church.ca), in the folder called “Nurture the Common Good”. Those two proposals are called:

- GS 10 Living into Reconciliation
- NIC 01 National Indigenous Circle – Restructuring of Indigenous Church

The following may also be helpful to reference.

Available in the “Indigenous Ministries” section on united-church.ca:

- The Caretakers of our Indigenous Circle’s *Calls to the Church* (on united-church.ca, Indigenous Ministries/Calls to the Church)

Available in the “Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice” section on united-church.ca:

- The United Church's *Commitment to UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (on united-church.ca: Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice/UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)
- The United Church's *Statement on UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the Framework for Reconciliation* (on united-church.ca: Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice/UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)
- *Affirming Other Spiritual Paths*, the United Church's statement acknowledging the value of Indigenous spiritualities (on united-church.ca: Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice/The Apologies)
- The United Church of Canada's Apologies to Indigenous Peoples (on united-church.ca: Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice/The Apologies)

Available on united-church.ca:

- Contact information for Regional Council Executive Ministers (search for "Regional Council")
- *The Manual* of The United Church of Canada_(under "Handbooks and Guidelines")