

Church adopts Social Justice Principles and addresses Designated Lay Ministry at Annual Meeting

The annual recall meeting of the 44th General Council met virtually on October 21, 2023, and was [livestreamed on YouTube](#) for observers.

Elder Evelyn Day, a Commissioner from Treaty 6 Territory, bookended the day's proceedings with prayer. The Equity team – Adele Halliday, Maedith Radlein, Sharon Ballantyne and Steven Johann – provided self-monitoring questions for participants to thoughtfully consider as the day progressed:

- Am I responding with my bias(es)?
- Just because we've always done it this way, should we continue?
- Who is missing around our table in this discussion? Do we need to consult wider?
- Whose voices haven't been heard? Have I spoken too much?
- Am I using correct pronouns for colleagues?
- Am I making assumptions based on race, sexual orientation, gender, to name a few?

Horacio Mesones, Centro Regional Ecuménico de Asesoría y Servicio (Argentina), brought [greetings](#) from The United Church of Canada Partner Council; members of the council are gathered in Canada from October 20-26 for the [first in-person session](#) since 2018.

A time of worship led by Graham Brownmiller included the Moderator's prayer for the Middle East and the hymn, "There is Room for All." Rev. Brownmiller also presided at communion, which was celebrated by Commissioners and Corresponding members from where they participated.

The meeting includes key proposals, the reception of reports, and was punctuated by several videos that illustrated various aspects of denominational work:

- [Becoming an Anti-Racist Church: Actions in Our Local Churches and Networks](#)
- [Admissions Matching](#)
- [UPRC Property Support for Communities of Faith \(Kindred Works\)](#)
- [Every word you'll ever need is in the Bible: Mohawk Bible Translation](#)
- [Lydia Gruchy](#)

Small group discussions in breakout rooms provided opportunities to discuss the proposals before the General Council, specifically the Principles-based justice framework and the Leadership in the 2020s proposal related to Designated Lay Ministers.

The two items required actions mandated to the annual meeting – approval of the Audited Financial statement and the setting of the Assessment rates – were approved by consent.

Principles-based Justice

At last summer's meeting, the General Council commissioned a set of principles that would govern the church's responses to historic, current, and emerging social justice issues and enable timely and contextual response. The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee (TICIF) completed the work and prepared a set of principles for initial adoption. In discussing the proposal, some Commissioners expressed the hope that the principles begin to be used immediately, with specific reference to action on issues related to Palestine and Israel. Others sought to have "humility" as an integral approach to the church's justice work.

Alison Etter, chair of TICIF, confirmed the intent to put the principles to use immediately, allowing evaluation over the next couple of years before introducing any required changes before a proposal for full adoption at GC45. She highlighted ways that the concept of humility was reflected in TICIF's work, such as through naming the problems of a colonial mentality and ensuring sincere dialogue through all processes

The motion to adopt "in principle" the Principles-based justice framework was carried.

Leadership for the 2020s

Since the failure of the "one order of ministry" remit, the denomination has been considering the role and functioning of Designated Lay Ministers (DLMs). While their practice of ministry is indistinguishable from that of ordered ministers in the eyes of many church members, DLMs are limited to appointments and not eligible for call, and they retain no status as ministry personnel between appointments and in retirement in many regional councils. The proposal tried — with five separate actions — to address outstanding issues, such as honouring service and call; providing a pathway to ordering; considering lay ministry; addressing future candidates without an undergraduate degree, and dealing consistently with retirement.

The five actions of the proposal were dealt with *in seriatim*. Discussion focused on questions regarding the accountability of retired DLMs to the church, additional study for equivalencies, and the cost and length of the educational pathways. The fifth action of the proposal garnered some discussion about finetuning the language from "encourage" to "require" regional councils

to review their policies related to DLMs voluntary associate ministry status; in the end, the proposal point stood as is, using the word “encourage.” All five actions passed without revision.

Reports

The Commissioners received a series of reports and were offered the opportunity to ask questions:

- General Secretary Report
- General Council Executive Report
- Strategic Plan Update
- Theology and Inter-Church, Inter-Faith Committee Report
- Anti-Racism Action Plan Update
- Reconciliation & Justice Update
- National Indigenous Council Update

The General Secretary and Kit Loewen, chair of the GCE business planning committee, answered a question about the decision to not have persons beyond the members of the Executive and Corresponding members present at General Council Executive meetings. Both noted the church is coming to terms with how the smaller, leaner executive works, including the idea that generative and strategic conversations, and the testing of ideas, should be done in an environment that nurtures trust-building and sound decisions.

The General Secretary outlined the ways the GCE is maintaining transparency and accountability, including:

- Documents and agendas are available on the Commons five to 10 days before each meeting;
- Summaries of the meetings are distributed and posted publicly on www.generalcouncil44.ca website within two days of the GCE meetings and General Council annual meeting;
- Subscribers to the above website get notification of the news items and other posts as soon as they’re published;
- Minutes are published on the Commons after the meetings.

Other questions asked for clarity on reductions in grants and the inclusion of Islamophobia and anti-Palestinianism, along with antisemitism, in the antiracism report. It was noted that commitment to address antisemitism had discrete attention in the report because it was mandated by GC44. All forms of racism are addressed in the church’s work of antiracism.

Former mission properties in the Democratic Republic of Korea

Prior to the Korean War, the United Church owned mission properties in what is now the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) invited the United Church to offer its own response to the PROK's Declaration Regarding the Renunciation of Claims to Property Left in the North for the Sake of Reconciliation between South and North Korea," adopted at its General Assembly in 2021.

The annual meeting was asked to approve a statement in support of the PROK's declaration and renounce claims to property, as an expression of The United Church of Canada's ongoing commitment to decolonization and reconciliation.

The motion was passed.

The General Secretary recognized and paid tribute to Dr. John Egger as the last solo ministry co-worker. Dr. Egger returned to Canada from Seoul in January and completed a period of "Home Assignment" through May this year, ending The United Church of Canada's global program sole Co-Worker in Mission appointments.

New Executive members and other highlights

The General Council appointed, and covenanted with, the following newly elected members to the General Council Executive until the 46th General Council, 2028:

- David Leyton-Brown (lay person, Shining Waters Regional Council)
- Alcris Limongi (ordained minister, Prairie to Pine Regional Council)

As this annual meeting drew to a close, the Moderator spoke about the various initiatives in the [Flourishing Project](#) and the extensive list of other activities in which she has participated this year.

Sarah Charters, President and Executive Officer of Philanthropy, highlighted a variety of [resources to support Mission and Service](#) including stories (formerly Minutes for Mission), worship materials, and a section entitled "Did You Know?"

The General Secretary also noted that the United Church has launched [an appeal for the humanitarian crisis](#) in the Middle East, to support those who are impacted by the conflict.

The meeting also approved a proposal on financial support for ministry personnel suspended while in a directed program.

To review the proposals and reports provided for the GCE for this meeting, go to [commons.united-church.ca](#) > Governance > General Council > 44th General Council (2022) > Meeting Documents > 2023-10 Annual Meeting.