

## **Backgrounder #6: Distribution of Responsibilities for the Processes of the Church**

The Comprehensive Review Task Group's recommendations would change where responsibilities for many key church processes lie. This backgrounder answers the question "How do we...?" for some of the most common processes.

### **Receive individuals as members?**

- An individual would become a member of a community of faith, which would maintain its own membership roll, as is the current practice.
- The denominational council would establish policies on membership in The United Church of Canada.
- The community of faith would set its own membership policy consistent with denominational policies.
- The community of faith would encourage members to continue to deepen their relationship with God through their journey of faith as followers of Jesus Christ.

### **Select and covenant with ministry personnel?**

- Each community of faith would determine its needs based on its vision, its resources, and the call of the Spirit.
- The College of Ministers would maintain a register of all accredited ministers, which would be available to communities of faith that are searching for ministers.
- The community of faith would discern appropriate ministry leadership from among those ministers accredited by the college.
- The community of faith would negotiate a covenant with the minister, including terms and conditions of appointment that would be no less than the minimum standards established by the denomination. Standards would include salary, benefits, pension, vacation, and study leave.
- The covenant would include the terms and conditions on which the relationship between the minister and the community of faith would end.
- If a community of faith ended the call or appointment of a minister because of incompetence or misconduct, including sexual abuse, the community of faith would have to report its actions to the college.
- A community of faith could determine that no paid minister is required for its ministries.

### **Acquire, sell, or redevelop property?**

- Communities of faith would hold property in trust for The United Church of Canada, except where the land and buildings are owned by the community of faith.
- Some communities of faith would not have property.
- A community of faith could purchase, sell, develop, and renew property subject to the policies of the regional and denominational councils.
- Regional staff would provide support, advice, and services to communities of faith with respect to property.
- The regional council would hold the community of faith accountable for being consistent with policy on decisions about congregational property.
- The local cluster could participate in strategies and dreaming, and support the work of discerning amalgamations, closures, and the development of new ministries enabled through changes in property.

### Celebrate new ministers?

- The denominational council would establish the pathways to ministry, the competencies for candidates, and criteria for admitting ministers from outside the United Church.
- Communities of faith and other organizations would nurture and encourage potential ministers.
- The regional council would appoint persons to accompany students on their pathways and appoint a supervisor for the internship period. Both the accompaniers and the supervisor would recommend to the college whether the candidate is suitable for ministry or of good character.
- The college would accredit ministers according to requirements established by the denominational council.
- The college would receive applications from ministers from outside the United Church and admit them according to the policy established by the denomination.
- The regional council would ordain, commission, recognize, and celebrate admissions regularly through public worship, according to the policies established by the denominational council.
- Local or regional networks of students could be created.

### Ensure ministers maintain "good standing"?

- The denominational council would establish standards for ministry, including continuing education or professional development requirements. These requirements could include mandatory training courses as well as police security checks and leadership development.
- Ministers would be responsible for establishing to the college each year that they have met these requirements before they are accredited for the following year.
- Ministers who fail to comply would be warned, but if they continue to fail to comply would be removed as members of the college and not permitted to continue in paid ministry.
- Ministers would determine what role an association of ministers might play in supporting ministers in their work.

### Exercise oversight of ministers?

- Allegations of incompetence or misconduct against a minister, including allegations of sexual abuse, would have to be reported to the college.
- The college would advise the minister of the complaint and seek a response. The complaint and response would be assessed by the complaints committee of the college, and where warranted, an independent person would be appointed to investigate. In serious cases, the complaints committee would order a formal hearing.
- Individuals chosen for the hearings committee would be ministers and lay people on the board of the college who have prior experience in conducting formal hearings. If the allegations of misconduct, sexual abuse, or incompetence were established, the hearings committee could discipline a minister, including removing him or her from membership in the college. A minister who is no longer a member of the college would not be permitted to serve in paid ministry.

### **Exercise oversight of communities of faith?**

- Communities of faith would establish a covenant with the regional council. The covenant would promote responsibility and high functioning within the community of faith.
- Regional staff would provide advice, support, and services to enable the community of faith to live out the terms of its covenant. (See Backgrounder #7: Sample Covenant).
- Regional staff would promote healthy relationships between ministers and communities of faith.
- Communities of faith would do regular self-assessments according to policies and standards of ministry established by the denominational council and file an accountability report with the regional council.
- Communities of faith could choose to share the work of self-assessment in local clusters, searching for best practices and receiving support from the clusters.
- The regional council could exercise spot audits to determine whether a community of faith is fulfilling its responsibilities. If it is not functioning effectively, the regional council could take appropriate action.
- If a complaint is made to the college about a minister, regional staff would support the community through the process.

### **Establish new communities of faith?**

- The regional council would be the accrediting body for new communities of faith.
- The denominational council would establish minimum standards as to size, frequency of gathering, and agreement with the doctrine of the United Church, while encouraging and enabling diverse new forms of ministry.
- Some communities of faith would not have paid ministers or hold property.

### **Do mission and ministry?**

- All councils of the church would carry out mission and ministry as this is our primary function.
- Communities of faith would establish mission and ministry as part of their covenants with regional councils and regularly assess the effectiveness of this mission and ministry.
- Local clusters would encourage shared ministries according to local needs and establish a mission strategy for the local area.
- Regional councils would oversee incorporated ministries and camps.
- Regional councils would establish budgets and distribute funds from the Mission and Service Fund of the United Church to support this work.
- Networks would bring together people of like interest for advocacy and action.

### **Establish a national voice?**

- The Moderator would be the primary spokesperson for the United Church.
- Proposals to the denominational council or its executive could require the support of other communities of faith, a network, or a regional council.
- For the denominational council to consider a proposal, the proposal might have to meet certain criteria. These criteria could include that a proposal
  - be of national or global concern of sufficient import that it requires response by the whole church

- address key social justice concerns that call the church to speak with one voice (e.g., human rights, social/economic justice policy, Aboriginal peoples and right relations, and environmental and international partnership issues)
- In general, communities of faith and networks would be encouraged to engage and take action themselves on issues they feel called to address.

### Engage in justice work?

- Communities of faith could engage directly with global partners in relationships of mutual ministry and mission.
- Denominational staff would continue to develop and maintain relationships with international partners in specific areas. These staff members could be located in the regions.
- Communities of faith would be encouraged to include engagement in local or global justice as part of their covenant. Local clusters would provide opportunities for learning about and engaging in justice work and bringing a prophetic voice in the world.
- Networks would bring together people of like interest for advocacy and action.