



Category 3 Remit

Study Guide for Remit 1: Three Council Model

Approved by the 42nd General Council 2015

Between February 2016 and 30 June 2017, each presbytery and pastoral charge will formally be asked in a category 3 remit to approve the implementation of a three-council model for The United Church of Canada.

This is the question to be voted on:

Does the presbytery/pastoral charge agree that:

- (a) the United Church be re-organized into the three-council model approved by the 42nd General Council 2015; and that
- (b) the Basis of Union be amended to reflect this change?

Summary

This remit proposes a major change to the structure of The United Church of Canada. Currently we have four courts, or levels, of church decision-making structure: pastoral charges, presbyteries, Conferences, and General Council. It is proposed that the church have three councils, or levels, with specific ministries and responsibilities. The proposal does not simply remove one of the existing courts, but replaces both of the current middle courts with a new regional council.

The intent of this reorganization is to create a sustainable and workable church structure in the face of a declining volunteer base and financial resources.

Background

The three-council model is intended to provide a church structure through which God's mission can be more effectively lived and expressed in diverse, faith-filled, and hopeful communities of faith. The model maintains our identity as a "united" church through relationships and connections among the three councils:

1. communities of faith
2. regional councils
3. a denominational council

The number of regional councils will be in the range of 12 to 15. The exact number of regional councils and the regional boundaries are expected to be decided by a commission. That commission would include representation from across the United Church, and it would be given a mandate to listen broadly to views and advice from the wider church, and to issue and receive comments on a draft report, before making the final determination.

This commission would not be appointed or start its work unless or until Remit 1: Three Council Model received the required threshold of approvals. (Voting on this remit is to be in by June 30, 2017.) The commission's decision on boundaries would come into effect only if Remit 1: Three Council Model is enacted by the next General Council.

Alongside the three councils, there will be clusters and networks. These will not be formal governance bodies but organically formed communities of common interests, mission, and support.

Staff for the regions will be deployed regionally, as they are now, but given the financial framework recognized by the Comprehensive Review Task Group it is likely most regional staff will serve more than one region.

Please see the appendix for detailed descriptions of all of these bodies.

For further information, we recommend you read and view some of the other resources related to this remit:

- the [GC42 Workbook](http://www.gc42.ca/workbook), CRTG 3 A Three-Council Model, PLENARY 14–21 (pages 336–343): www.gc42.ca/workbook
- [Video: The Proposed Three-Council Model](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report): www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report, under Resources
- [Backgrounder 5: A Three-Council Model](http://www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report): www.gc42.ca/comprehensive-review-report

Characteristics of a three-council model

A three-council model would be a more flexible, sustainable, and simplified structure.

- The current four-council model incorporates the different governance and oversight structures of, primarily, the three major founding denominations. It contains checks and balances in decision-making that were important in 1925. The proposed three-council model relaxes some of those checks and balances by lodging more decision-making with the local ministry, with the support and oversight of a regional body that is larger than the current presbytery.
- The proposed new structure retains our conciliar model, whereby significant theological and policy initiatives originate with the local community of faith and make their way through the wisdom of the larger regional body to the wisdom of the whole church represented in the denominational council.
- Clusters and networks will provide more contemporary vehicles for local ministries and members to connect and work with one another regionally and nationally.
- The three-council model should result in fewer committees requiring fewer volunteers.

From pastoral charges to communities of faith

- Communities of faith will include congregations as we know them, but increasingly may also include new kinds of communities that gather to worship, learn, and serve, such as outreach ministries, house churches, online communities, and so on.
- They will have more freedom to nurture and live out their faith in a variety of ways, including recognizing, receiving, and celebrating new members; making decisions on their structure and governance, mission, and property; and covenanting with ministers and staff. They will still be subject to denominational and regional policies and accountable through the covenantal relationship between the community of faith and the regional council.

- They will receive support from the regional and denominational councils to meet their responsibilities for governance, human resources, property, pastoral relations, and other functions.
- They will be more closely connected to decision-making bodies through their direct participation in regional councils, enhancing their understanding of decisions related to ministry and mission priorities and support services and governance.
- Members of communities of faith will still be elected to serve in other councils of the church.

From presbyteries and Conferences to regional councils

- The membership of regional councils will be made up of lay and ministry personnel.
- Regional councils will covenant with and provide advice, support, and services to communities of faith in areas such as human resources and property, and in making connections to national and global partners for social justice, pastoral relations, and outreach.
- Regional councils will be involved in preparing and training church leadership and will provide support to the relationships between communities of faith and ministry personnel, which currently occurs at both the presbytery and Conference levels. They will accompany students, provide mentors, and appoint supervisors for internships, and celebrate ordinations, commissionings, admissions, recognitions, and retirements.
- They will ensure communities of faith are living up to their covenantal relationship, attempt to resolve disputes, and step in if a community is not functioning effectively or is failing to meet its responsibilities.
- Regional councils or their executives will meet at least annually, just as Conferences or their executives do now.
- Staff located regionally will support the work of the regional councils and will have accountability to those councils. Those staff may support more than one regional council.

From General Council to a denominational council

- The denominational council will continue the primary role of the current General Council—to provide a denominational, national, global voice and identity, setting policies and directions, and electing a Moderator.
- It will make decisions on denomination-shaping issues, such as public witness, theology, and governance structure.
- It will have a much smaller executive than the current one, facilitating more timely decision-making.
- The number of staff of the denominational council office will be determined by the financial resources available.

Clusters and networks

Alongside the three-council structure there would be

- clusters: local clusters of communities of faith that would provide community and support for communities of faith and their leaders, and focus on worship, mission, learning, collegiality, and strategic planning
- networks: groups of people in different parts of the country working on specific issues (e.g., supportive housing, intercultural ministry, youth ministry) or on a project (e.g., planning an event)

These would offer opportunities for communities of faith and people with shared interests and passions to connect outside decision-making bodies.

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 a study process be available in the church before the remit is released.

The proposed change must be sent to all presbyteries and the governing body of every pastoral charge for a vote. If an absolute majority of the presbyteries and an absolute majority of the pastoral charges vote in favour of the proposed change—not just a majority of those that vote—then the next General Council must also vote in favour of the proposed change for it to take effect.

NB: If a presbytery or pastoral charge does not vote, that is considered a vote AGAINST the proposal.

Appendix “A” to Remit 1 - Three Council Model

The United Church of Canada, organized as a three-council structure, would consist of communities of faith, regional councils, and a denominational council as follows:

1. COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

A. Description

A community of faith is any community of people within the United Church that:

- gathers to explore faith, worship, and serve, including but not limited to pastoral charges, congregations, outreach ministries, chaplaincies, faith-based communal living, house churches, and online communities; and
- is recognized as a community of faith within the United Church by the regional council through a covenantal relationship between the community of faith and the regional council.

B. Membership

The members of the community of faith are:

- people admitted to membership by the community of faith, within denominational guidelines;
- eligible for election to denominational council and regional council; and
- entitled to vote on all community of faith matters; and entitled to extend the right to vote on financial and administrative matters to adherents.

C. Authority and responsibility

The community of faith has authority and responsibility for:

Mission

- living in covenant with the regional council with mutual responsibilities for the life and mission of the community of faith, and fulfilling its responsibilities under the covenant;
- doing regular self-assessments of the ministry of the community of faith; and filing the report with the regional council;
- joining the hearts, voices, and resources of the community to witness to the gospel and vision of Jesus for a compassionate and just society, both in Canada and around the world;
- local, regional, national and global initiatives and partnerships (community, ecumenical and interfaith) for ministry, mission and justice work;
- ministry with children and youth and young adults;
- honouring and living into intercultural mission and ministry;

Becoming an Intercultural Church

- living in covenant with Mother Earth and All My Relations in the Earth community;

Governance and administration

- making decisions about the life of the community of faith, including worship, care, spiritual practice, and learning; local administration, finances, and governance, and local mission, justice, and evangelism;
- meeting at least annually;
- complying with denominational and regional policies;
- buying, selling, leasing, and renovating community of faith property in cooperation with the regional council, within denominational guidelines;

Spiritual life

- setting policies for membership, within denominational guidelines and receiving and celebrating new members in the community of faith;
- helping members deepen their faith while exploring their faith journey;
- ensuring the proper administration of the sacraments;

Ministry and other leadership

- cooperation with the regional council, within denominational guidelines, in recruiting, choosing, calling, appointing, and covenanting with ministry personnel and other staff, and in ending calls and appointments/covenants with ministry personnel and other staff;
- encouraging members to consider ministry roles a responsibility shared through the whole community of faith;
- recommending to the appropriate body suitable lay members as inquirers, candidates, and licensed lay worship leaders, as and if required under denominational policy;

Participation in regional and denominational life

- helping to fund the cost of sending members to the meetings of the regional council;
- electing members to serve on regional council with shared funding of the cost; and
- receiving, dealing with, and forwarding on proposals from members of the community of faith to regional councils.

D. Limitations

All authority and responsibility of the community of faith is subject to:

- policies set by the denominational council on membership, governance, pastoral relations, property, and any other area within the authority of the denominational council;
- the covenantal relationship between the community of faith and the regional council; and
- the authority of the regional council to assume control of the community of faith in extraordinary circumstances where the community of faith is unable to or refuses to meet its responsibilities or acts outside of denominational or regional policies.

2. REGIONAL COUNCILS

A. *Description*

A regional council is a decision-making body responsible to serve and support communities of faith within its bounds and provide necessary oversight.

B. *Membership*

The regional council is composed of:

- all ministry personnel within the geographic bounds served by the regional council; and
- lay members elected by the community of faith, respecting the balance of lay and ministry personnel where possible.

C. *Authority and responsibility*

The regional council has authority and responsibility for:

Covenanting:

- recognizing a new community of faith by entering into a covenantal relationship with it;
- living in a covenantal relationship with each community of faith, with mutual responsibilities for the life and mission of the community of faith, and fulfilling its responsibilities under the covenant;
- living in a covenantal relationship with ministry personnel;

Services for communities of faith:

- providing support, advice, and services to communities of faith in human resource matters;
- providing support, advice, and services to communities of faith in dealing with congregational property;
- managing regional archives;
- providing on-going leadership training for ministers and lay persons;
- providing funding partnerships with United Church educational and leadership training centres and camps as determined regionally;

Serve, support and provide oversight of communities of faith:

- reviewing and periodically auditing the self-assessments of communities of faith in light of the covenant between the community of faith and the regional council;
- supporting emerging new ministries;
- supporting communities of faith in their life and work;
- serving, supporting and providing oversight when necessary of camps and incorporated ministries in the region;
- promoting articulation of mission and ministry;

- ensuring compliance with the policies and polity of The United Church of Canada and reviewing any relevant records;
- assuming control of a community of faith in extraordinary circumstances where the community of faith is unable to or refuses to meet its responsibilities or acts outside of denominational policies;

Mission and ministry:

encourage and engage in:

- joining our collective hearts, voices, and resources to witness to the gospel and vision of Jesus for a compassionate and just society, both in Canada and around the world;
- local regional national and global initiatives and partnerships (community, ecumenical and interfaith) for ministry, mission and justice work;
- ministry with children, youth and young adults;
- honouring and living into intercultural ministry and mission; and
- living in covenant with Mother Earth and All My Relations in the Earth community;

Policy and finance:

- administering policy set by the denominational council, and setting appropriate regional policy;
- buying, selling, leasing, and renovating community of faith property in cooperation with communities of faith, and distributing any proceeds within denominational guidelines;
- buying, selling, leasing, and renovating regional property, and distributing any proceeds within denominational guidelines;
- receiving, dealing with, and forwarding on proposals from communities of faith to the denominational council based on denominational policy;
- setting and managing its annual budget including revenue from the denominational assessment and setting any additional regional assessment for any additional services the regional council wishes to undertake;
- participating in determining priorities for mission and ministry work through Mission and Service;
- meeting at least annually as the entire regional council or through its executive;

Preparation for Ministry:

- recruitment and discernment of persons for ministry;
- accompaniment and supervision of persons in the preparation process;
- ordination and commissioning of members of the order of ministry;
- recognition of Designated Lay Ministers;
- licensing of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders;
- celebrations of admissions and re-admissions;

Pastoral Relations:

- cooperating with communities of faith in recruiting, choosing, calling, appointing and covenanting with ministry personnel and communities of faith, and in ending calls and appointments/covenants with ministry personnel and other staff;
- celebrating retirements;

Oversight of ministry personnel:

- encouraging and supporting ministry personnel towards health, joy and excellence in ministry practice;
- assisting with informal conflict resolution processes;

- maintaining the roll of ministry personnel and informing the office of vocation of those ministry personnel in good standing;

Participation in denominational life:

- electing members to serve on denominational council.
- receiving, dealing with, and forwarding on proposals from members of the community of faith to the denominational council; and
- promoting and fostering direct dialogue between communities of faith and the denominational council.

D. Limitations

- policies set by the denominational council on membership, governance, pastoral relations, candidacy, ministry personnel, property, and any other area within the authority of the denominational council; and
- the authority of the denominational council to assume control of the regional council in extraordinary circumstances where the regional council is unable to or refuses to meet its responsibilities or acts outside of denominational or regional policies.

E. Staffing

Each region has staff to assist the regional council in meeting its responsibilities:

- staffing numbers are based on assessments, grants from Mission and Service, and any other regional income;
- staffing is based on priorities and needs as determined regionally;
- staff are hired and managed by a regional secretary who reports to the General Secretary of the denominational council and relates to the regional council executive; and
- regional councils with more resources are free to retain more staff, and sharing of all resources across the church is encouraged.

3. DENOMINATIONAL COUNCIL

A. Description

The denominational council is the decision-making body for the United Church as both a denomination and a legal corporation.

B. Membership

The denominational council consists of:

- those elected by the regional councils according to an agreed-upon formula
- the presiding officer or elder of each regional council;
- the Moderator and the immediate Past Moderator;
- the General Secretary of the denominational council; and
- other members and guests as determined.

C. Authority and responsibility

The denominational council has authority and responsibility for:

Mission:

- joining our collective hearts, voices, and resources to witness to the gospel and vision of Jesus for a compassionate and just society, both in Canada and around the world;
- engaging denominational-level ministry and mission including resource development and being a resource to regional councils and communities of faith;

- encouraging local and regional mission and ministry, partnerships, ecumenical and interfaith;
- engaging in national and global partnerships, ecumenical and interfaith relationships;
- honouring and living into intercultural mission and ministry;
- living in covenant with Mother Earth and All My Relations in the Earth community;

Policy:

- setting policies for the denomination on doctrine, worship, membership, governance, pastoral relations, property, and the entrance to paid accountable ministry;
- making decisions on denomination-shaping issues relating to public witness;
- dealing with proposals received from regional councils;

Governance:

- electing a Moderator;
- electing the executive of the denominational council;
- referring all unfinished matters to the executive of the denominational council;
- meeting once every three years in person, with members having the option of full participation through electronic or equivalent means;
- meeting more frequently as required through electronic or equivalent means;
- approving the number and boundaries of regional councils, supporting them and promoting parity of service across regions;

Finance and administration:

- setting a three-year budget framework for the church
- determining the assessment formula for communities of faith and assessing them to meet the requirements of the budget; and
- maintaining the denominational archives.

D. Limitations

The authority and responsibility of the denominational council is subject to the following limitations:

- *remit*: the Basis of Union may only be changed through the remit process, which requires the approval of a majority of the presbyteries and also, if the General Council considers it advisable because the change is substantive or denomination-shaping, pastoral charges;
- *membership requirements*: no terms of admission to full membership may be prescribed other than those laid down in the New Testament;
- *freedom of worship*: the freedom of worship enjoyed by churches at the time of union in 1925 may not be interfered with in the United Church; and
- *property*: all policy on congregational property adopted by the denominational council must comply with the requirements set in The United Church of Canada Act, 1925.

E. Executive of the denominational council

The executive of the denominational council is the decision-making body for the United Church between meetings of the denominational council, living into covenantal relationship and mutually accountable with the denominational council, regional councils, and communities of faith, with the following membership, authority and responsibility:

membership:

a fixed number between 12 and 18 members, with the exact number set by the denominational council;

authority and responsibility:

- dealing with all unfinished matters referred to it by the denominational council;
- dealing with all routine and emergency work of the denominational council between meetings of the denominational council;
- establishing standing and other committees; and
- exercising additional authority and subject to any limitations as set by the denominational council.

F. Staffing

The denominational council has staff to assist it in meeting its responsibilities through:

- staffing based on assessments of communities of faith, grants from Mission and Service, and other denominational income;
- staffing based on the priorities and needs as determined denominationally;
- administering denominational policies;
- providing centralized technical services such as information technology, communication, payroll, accounting, human resources, administration, and pension plan;
- supporting the Moderator; and
- providing leadership in global partnerships and national-level ministry and mission work.

4. CLUSTERS AND NETWORKS

Alongside the three-council structure, there are clusters and networks that, while not formal governance bodies, are central to the living out of the faith of the United Church:

- *clusters*: local clusters of communities of faith that provide community and support for communities of faith and their leaders, and focus on worship, mission, learning, collegiality, and strategic planning; and
- *networks*: linking people working on specific issues (e.g. supportive housing, intercultural ministry, youth ministry) or for project work (e.g. event planning) that function through the whole church, depending on the issue.