

General Secretary, General Council Accountability Report
Origin: General Secretary, General Council

Greetings Sisters and Brothers in Christ.

In just a few weeks, we will be together in Toronto, meeting for the first time as the Executive of the General Council for the new triennium. I look ahead to that time with anticipation of relationships being formed and strengthened, in service of Christ's church.

Sometimes, it seems as if we have barely had time to digest all of the events and decisions of the 40th General Council 2009. Other times, it seems as though our time in Kelowna was ages and ages ago.

Since the beginning of September, we have been working actively with the business from General Council, sorting the things that could be done right away or without further resources, the things that require policy direction before moving to an implementation phase, and the things that can't proceed unless we can identify new or reallocated funds for them.

At the upcoming Executive meeting, you will consider the work that the General Council referred to its Executive, and you will also engage in a process led by the Work Flow and Priorities Task Group to prioritize and focus the work of the coming triennium.

Now that I have completed almost three years in this role, and have my first General Council as General Secretary behind me, I recognize that I have to forget having any shortcomings forgiven on account of my being "new."

Someone challenged me recently to name the things that I think are important to the United Church in the next three years. I hesitated, not because I don't have views, but because I respect the distinct roles of elected members and staff. I understand that to mean that the big directions need to be set by the elected bodies. However, I am in an unusual position as both the senior member of staff, and a member of the Executive. At Executive meetings, my focus is mostly on process: making sure that you have the information you need, and the processes you need to make the decisions you need to make. My voice to the Executive is primarily heard through my accountability reports, like this one. So here are my thoughts.

If I could pick only three things for us to commit our efforts to over the next three years, they would be:

- Developing a new generation of leaders for our ministries
- Reforming relationships between courts of the church, with a focus on supporting one another to actively live Christ's mission in all parts of the church
- Sharing the good news in new and meaningful ways to the "unchurched" majority

Let me elaborate a little bit, but just a bit — these are big topics.

New Generation of Leaders

I call your attention to the following passage from *Called to be Church*:

We also wrestle with our leadership resources as we head into the future. Of the 2,200 ministry personnel serving pastoral charges, 70 percent are age 50 or more and 3 percent are under the age of 35. One-half of all ministry personnel presently serving pastoral charges will reach the normal age of retirement within the next 10 years.

No organization can survive without new young leaders coming in to take over from those whose time of service is ending. I believe we can attract and develop the leaders we need, but it will not happen without an intentional focus. We need to identify all the things that are currently barriers, as well as things we can do to support and encourage those who are called to serve. This will need to be part of a comprehensive plan using threads from the work already done on Meaning of Ministry, Candidacy Pathways, Emerging Spirit, and others, and weaving them together in new ways that take into account directly the needs of the church in its diverse places, and the needs of those we seek to call. Sometimes, our discussions in these areas seem a bit abstract. Perhaps if we stated specific objectives (100 new ministers?) it would help us make the changes we need in order to achieve them.

Reformed Relationships and Structures of the Courts of the Church

Reporting to the Executive in June 2007 in the document *Plans Towards 2010*, I noted that one of the areas that needed to be addressed was the role of each of the courts of the church, and how best to complement and support one another. We have made only a start at this, and we need to ask more direct questions. Do we have the right number of courts? Is the work of the church allocated appropriately among the courts?

We spend a lot of time in the United Church on process, and a lot of the process relates more to meeting the needs of the institution than the needs of the mission to which Jesus calls us. Our processes and structures are complicated and take up an increasing percentage of staff and volunteer time, and resources. It is not possible or necessary for all in the church to have identical understandings of what our faith calls us to do. It is essential that we each, wherever we are in the church, listen to God's call and carry our faith into our actions in all parts of our lives. By examining and reforming our structures, we can find new ways to work together to serve others. This will require both leadership, and willingness to let go and recognize leadership offered by others in all parts of the church.

“The Unchurched Majority”

Most Canadians, especially those under 50, have no regular pattern of religious practice, and many have no experience of church and very little idea of the basic tenets of Christianity. Yet as Christians, we believe we have good news to share, through a faith that gives meaning and hope. To do this effectively, we need tools and practices to share our stories and beliefs with adults who come with adult questions and life experiences. This generation will come as seekers, looking to learn and act in meaningful ways, not because of social pressure or duty.

We need to be willing to invite these seekers into the United Church in ways that may look quite different from the worship practices to which we are accustomed. For our message to be effective in today's Canada, we must be able to share it in an intercultural context. We have the opportunity to build on the lessons we have learned from Emerging Spirit, using both high-tech communications and personal contact, to offer learning and study opportunities to develop faith that calls people to action in our world. Some will call this evangelization, and perhaps we should not be afraid of that concept.

At the November meeting of the Executive, you will be setting priorities or directing the focus for our work in the coming triennium. My work and that of all of us at the General Council will be guided by the directions you set. I offer these reflections for your consideration during these processes, and not in any way to pre-empt your discussions and discernment.

Now, let me report to you on some of the work we have been carrying out at the direction of the previous Executive, and the follow-up to General Council.

General Council Follow-up

The 40th General Council 2009 directed more than 40 items to me for development and implementation. Some of them, including letters conveying the church's position on a variety of issues, have already been completed. Others will take more time to develop and implement. Of course, many items were also directed to the Executive, and you will begin prioritizing and working on them at the November meeting.

I have already shared with you a chart summarizing the decisions of the 40th General Council, and will update it regularly to keep you informed of the progress being made. An updated version will be made available to you at the November meeting.

The General Council approved six remits. Two remits have already been sent to presbyteries, and the deadline for returning voting cards is November 12, 2009.

Another matter that will require a remit is the alternate motion to SK6 that the 40th General Council adopted. The motion reads as follows:

That the 40th General Council 2009

1. In the area of Doctrine, The United Church of Canada recognizes the primacy of Scripture, with the "Doctrine Section of the Basis of Union", "1940 Statement of Faith", "A New Creed," and "A Song of Faith" each being recognized as a 'subordinate standard' of the United Church as contemplated by Declaration 3(b) of The United Church of Canada Act.
2. Declare that "Doctrine" of the United Church for all purposes in the Basis of Union, By-Laws, and Appendices of The Manual be those subordinate standards, subordinate to Scripture, that are so approved by the United Church in accordance with the conditions contained within The United Church of Canada Act; and

3. Authorize a remit to Presbyteries and to Pastoral Charges to test the will of the United Church with respect to these declarations and recognition.

The remit to test the will of the church on this proposal is a Category Three remit requiring a period of two years of study in the church before it is issued. In order to place the remit before the church in time for a report to the 41st General Council 2012, the study process will need to be available by this coming January.

With this time frame in mind, I will ensure that a study document is developed and available to the church in January and schedule the remit to be released in January 2012 with the results reported to the 41st General Council 2012.

Communicating with Commissioners

Commissioners do not cease to be commissioners at the close of General Council. Rather, they continue in this important leadership role for the duration of the triennium, and are a tremendous resource for our church. That's why I am committed to informing commissioners about the work being done to implement the decisions they made in Kelowna, and engaging them in the process.

Since General Council, I have sent letters regularly to commissioners to update them on steps we have taken and progress we have made. These communications are also aimed at keeping commissioners apprised of meetings and other events at which they may wish their voices to be heard. As part of this strategy, I will make available to commissioners key documents related to church governance, such as agendas for Executive meetings and status updates on the work of General Council. I have also started sending commissioners my weekly letter in the hopes that it will give them a more personal perspective on my work.

I want this to be a two-way conversation. To that end, I am encouraging commissioners to continue taking an active role in church governance by sharing their opinions and views with Executive members from their Conferences.

A highlight of General Council was the enthusiasm and ideas the Youth Forum brought to the meeting. Those youth who so energized General Council are the future of our church. That's why I am developing a communications strategy to engage them in the work we are doing.

Changes to the Management Structure of the General Council Office

At its March 2009 meeting, the Executive approved changes to the management structure of the General Council Office. That decision followed a commitment to review the balance between management and non-management positions in the General Council Office after budget and staff cuts in 2007. The changes that were approved relate to the model of management for the General Council Office, and are not a reflection on the merit of any individuals.

As a result of this decision, there is no longer a Senior Leadership Team, and the five General Council Minister positions were eliminated. Two new General Council Officer positions were created, and the General Council Ministers were given priority in staffing those positions.

As a result of that process, Bruce Gregersen is the General Council Officer, Programs, with responsibility for Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations, Financial Stewardship, Resource Production and Distribution, and a new unit consolidating work related to intercultural, French, congregational, and community ministries. Carol Hancock is the General Council Officer, Conciliar Relations, with responsibility for the meeting life and governance role of the General Council, and the connection between the General Council and the courts of the church.

The reorganization meant we had to say goodbye with sorrow to three valued colleagues who had served the church diligently and faithfully as members of the Senior Leadership Team. Ian Fraser, Janet McDonald, and Kim Uyede-Kai ended their ministries with General Council Office on April 30, 2009. We wish them well in their future endeavours.

Another change approved at the March Executive meeting was bringing into a new configuration overseen by one Executive Minister the work being carried out by Intercultural and Diverse Communities in Ministry, l'Unité des Ministères en Français, and Congregational, Educational, and Community Ministries. That process will be complete by January 1, 2010.

Michael Blair, Pierre Goldberger, and Harry Oussoren, the Executive Ministers of the three units, were tasked with leading this process, in consultation with staff, elected members, constituency groups, and other stakeholders. The process has been grounded in commitments to working collegially, intentionally, organically, and taking the time it needs. Other principles guiding this work include ensuring the distinctive identity and gifts of the three units' constituencies are valued and sustained, recognizing that the work of each of the units and all three together is vital to the identity, well being, and mission of the whole church, and ensuring minority voices are sustained in forums or at tables where they are currently present and are added or increased in groups where they are not present.

Michael Blair will be the Executive Minister of the new unit. Harry Oussoren will be retiring on December 31, 2009. Pierre Goldberger will continue in his role until his retirement. At that point, l'Unité des Ministères en Français will be led by a "Responsible," who will regularly attend the management table. The staff groups will remain in their current clusters for an interim period as the new unit takes shape. A process for naming the unit will get underway shortly.

Sharing Bread

In response to the global economic crisis over the past year, the Executive approved at its March meeting the creation of a \$500,000 crisis response fund. "Sharing Bread" initially aimed to distribute \$210,000 to Canadian ministries, an equal amount to global partners, and \$80,000 for ministry-personnel support as a response to the economic crisis.

The domestic portion of the program attracted 57 proposals, ranging from food banks and camps, to innovative ways to provide financial assistance and food. Fifty of those applications met the criteria that had been set, and received funding. Due to the strong response to the initiative, the Sub-Executive approved in July the allocation of an additional \$150,000 for the Canadian portion of the program. Of the more than \$614,000 applied for, \$335,921 was disbursed.

The Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations unit administers the global partner grants, and anticipates making decisions about distributing those funds by the end of the year. The Human Resources unit, in co-operation with continuing education staff in the Congregational, Educational and Community Ministries unit, is undertaking the development of the ministry-personnel support portion of the program.

Environics Congregational Report program

Congregations and other mission units are seeing this report as a strong aid to contextualizing their ministry. Orders are coming from both individual congregations, and whole presbyteries as a way of doing regional mission planning, usually as part of a larger congregational support and renewal program. Environics is keeping pace with the orders. Training events have been held in partnership with eight Conferences, where the program enjoys high credibility. An intensive Training the Trainer workshop is planned for October 20-21 in Toronto, which will see between 20 and 30 facilitators trained to support and accompany congregations, presbyteries, and other mission units. Participants will include regional representatives, Emerging Spirit workshop leaders, regional gift planners, and other congregational consultants. The names of trained facilitators will be placed on www.united-church.ca for contact by congregations.

Aboriginal Ministries

There have been many exciting developments in Aboriginal Ministries since the last Executive meeting.

I had the privilege of attending the first National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering in early June in Norway House, Manitoba. Because it was just a beginning, and was held before the Aboriginal Ministries Council was formally created, I believe it might be appropriate for another gathering to be held earlier than 2012, and then every three years thereafter.

The Aboriginal Ministries Council held its first meeting from September 14-16, 2009. As you will read in the council's report, the meeting helped lay the spiritual foundation for the group and its work. I was honoured to join them for one of those days. This is a good beginning for the council, whose mandate is to build a strong spiritual base in Aboriginal communities that will enable them to move toward decolonization and wholeness.

As Laverne Jacobs prepares to retire, I have also been involved this fall, along with members of the Aboriginal Ministries Council, in interviewing candidates for the position of Aboriginal Ministries Coordinator.

Justice

Funding for The United Church of Canada/Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) program for 2009-2013 has been approved and signed. This was welcome news as the application and approval process was long and gruelling during a time of change at CIDA. The CIDA grant is for \$3,972,000 (\$993,000 in each of four years, an increase of just over 6 percent over the last program period) to the overall 2009-2013 program of \$ 6,400,025. The United Church will contribute the remaining \$2,428,025. Staff will work with partner groups to provide the detailed monitoring and reporting required by CIDA. Entitled "Strengthening Capacity for

Justice,” the program’s goal is to strengthen the capacity of partner organizations to address human rights and build just, participatory, sustainable communities, especially for impoverished and marginalized groups. The program was designed by the United Church and 11 partner groups in consultation with CIDA.

In the last triennium, significant fundraising efforts resulted in \$273,000 being raised for the United for Peace campaign. The second phase of the campaign has focused on education and advocacy to promote peace, particularly in Canada, the Philippines, Colombia, and Israel/Palestine.

Initiatives are also underway to follow up on the report *Reviewing Partnership in the Context of Empire*, which was approved by the Executive in November 2008. These include program work toward engaging all courts in mission relationships, and a proposal for a Partners Council.

The United Church has applied for membership in a newly-formed global ecumenical network, Action by the Churches Together Alliance. Membership will enable the United Church to continue distributing emergency relief funds through the alliance’s mechanism and global network.

Caring for Creation

I am pleased to report that Moderator Mardi Tindal will be part of a World Council of Churches delegation in December to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. This conference is aimed at securing a comprehensive international climate change agreement, and the Moderator will be joining other faith communities in providing moral and spiritual leadership in this important arena. The Moderator’s presence will also offer encouragement to political and social leaders in Canada by showing the United Church recognizes the imminent danger of climate change and is working toward a more just and sustainable world.

I am also putting before you a proposal (GS 16 page GREEN 35-37) asking you to endorse the Moderator’s “Plan for Participating in God’s Abundant Healing of Creation” and allocate funds to carry it out its first phase. As you know, the Moderator has made the healing of creation one of her key priorities, and wants the church to take on a stronger leadership role in tackling one of the most pressing issues of our time.

Of course, the church has already shown considerable leadership in environmental issues. In June, the church hosted two gatherings of the World Council of Churches: an international seminar on Eco-Justice and Ecological Debt, which brought together church representatives and experts from every continent, and a meeting of the World Council of Churches Reference Group on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology.

One thematic lens adopted is the concept of “ecological debt” incurred by the countries of the global north. The United Church participates in ecumenical networks calling for climate justice and immediate action to address the needs of peoples in the global south who are the creditors of climate debt. Materials on the United Church website encourage church members to participate with KAIROS in the KYOTO*Plus* Campaign. In May, the church was well-represented in the

KAIROS Religious Leaders' Tour of the Tar Sands by former Moderator Bill Phipps. The church also supported the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition to send three young Canadians to the United Nations Climate Change Conference last year, and will again this year.

Pastoral Charge Payroll Service

The Pastoral Charge Payroll Service has been rolling out in Conferences since May 2007. As of September 30, 2009, approximately 70 percent of all participating pastoral charges were processing, or ready to process, their payroll through ADP, the payroll service provider.

Based on feedback from treasurers, procedures and processes are continually being monitored and improved. Added functionality to the payroll service is being investigated, with an anticipated implementation date of some new services early in 2010. Although there continue to be challenges, more treasurers are indicating their experience dealing with ADP is favourable.

Human Resources staff are communicating with presbyteries and Conferences to gain their support and assistance in reaching out to the 30 percent of pastoral charges that have not yet made contact with ADP. ADP will also be calling treasurers to offer support in completing the enrolment forms. One challenge is deciding how to proceed with pastoral charges that have refused to participate in the payroll service. Fifty-three pastoral charges have sent us formal notification of their intent to refuse, but we suspect there are many more.

Performance Management

A new performance-management system is being developed and is expected to be implemented for 2010. It is an integrated process in which setting objectives, achieving results, demonstrating appropriate behaviours, and continuous feedback are linked. It is a values-based system, in which the values of the organization are the foundation on which setting objectives and achieving results are built.

Staffing Update

Alan Hall started as Executive Officer of the Human Resources unit on September 1, 2009.

Economic Adjustment

The Sub-Executive meeting in June received correspondence raising concern about the application of the cost of living salary increases across all General Council Office positions. The Sub-Executive supports the maintenance of the current practice for 2010, while asking that the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services give consideration to the concerns raised. The Permanent Committee reviewed the existing policy at its meeting in May 2009, has received the more recent correspondence, and will return at its January meeting to the concerns raised in the correspondence.

Racial Justice Training

A program for racial justice training for ministry personnel was adopted by the 39th General Council in 2006. A program has been developed under the leadership of a coordinator, including extensive consultation and pilot workshops. In November 2009, a group of 70 racial justice trainers will be trained to implement the program in every presbytery/district throughout the

church. The intention is that every presbytery will have offered a training event by the end of 2010. During the spring of 2010, the coordinator will work with theological schools to ensure that racial justice training is included for future ministry personnel.

Designated Lay Ministry

The transition to the new model of paid lay ministry continues to progress with the offering of the first intake to a training program offered at Calling Lakes in January 2010. A handbook for pastoral relations committees and education and students committees has been disseminated throughout the church and continues to be available on the church web site. The handbook outlines the procedures to be followed, as well as offering a position categorization tool to help presbyteries adjudicate the appropriate lay ministry category for lay ministry positions.

Communication about the Designated Lay Ministry program has been a challenge. In September, a project management consultant assisted staff in developing a new communication plan, which they have started to implement.

As was evident at General Council, we as a church continue to wrestle with our expressions of ministry. The *Statement on Paid Accountable Ministry in The United Church of Canada* will assist in the ongoing conversations, including this one on Designated Lay Ministries.

Ministry Personnel Support

A “social network” web site to support United Church leaders was launched in the spring of 2009 (<http://churchleadership.united-church.ca/>). It has grown to a membership of almost 750 members, both lay leaders and ministry personnel. Several specific groups are offered on the network, creating a valuable communication link between church leaders and the staff of the General Council Office.

Emerging Spirit

At the direction of the 40th General Council 2009, discussion and planning are taking place about ways to continue the work of WonderCafe, and its French-language counterpart, Caféchange, in partnership with the Resource Production and Distribution unit. The unit’s web group and the WonderCafe team have met several times to discuss the logistics involved in building a new United Church web strategy that incorporates the interactive, Web 2.0 qualities of the WonderCafe site. Staff members are also continuing to explore alternate funding sources.

Emerging Spirit staff are continuing to offer presentations and workshops aimed at applying learnings for church growth and development. They have also been in contact with United Church-affiliated theological schools and learning centres across the country to express their willingness to offer workshops or engage in other conversations. To date, they have had responses from the Vancouver School of Theology, St. Andrews College, and Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto.

Sabbatical Leaves for Intentional Interim Ministers

The by-laws of the church provide for a sabbatical leave for ministers who serve in a pastoral charge ministry for at least five consecutive years. In November 2008, a proposal came before

the Executive to establish a policy and program to provide a sabbatical leave for ministry personnel who serve in a series of Intentional Interim Ministries. The policy was approved, but no proposal was forwarded to the 40th General Council 2009 to amend the *Manual* references to sabbatical leaves. Since the *Manual* (039.1) does not explicitly exclude Intentional Interim Ministers not in appointment, the General Council Office proposes to implement the sabbatical leave program for Interim Ministers in 2010. If the Executive deems that the *Manual* should be changed for clarity (039.1), then a proposal would be required for the 41st General Council 2012 to consider.

General Secretary's Supervision Committee

I am grateful for the support, encouragement, and guidance my supervisory committee provides me. My thanks go to Paul Reed and Glen Bailey, who have recently completed terms on the committee. I am pleased to welcome John Young and Mary Laidlaw, and look forward to the wisdom and insight they will offer.

Upcoming Events

I am excited to let you know about some of the events the church is hosting or for which it is providing leadership:

- A national consultation for racialized youth, to be held in November 2009.
- RiverRunning, a regional intercultural church event in Winnipeg from November 20-22, 2009.
- A planning meeting for the international Ecumenical Network for Multicultural Ministries, also in Winnipeg, from November 22-25, 2009. Participants include members from the World Council of Churches, the Uniting Church of Australia, and the Presbyterian Church USA.
- A Black Religious Scholars Group Consultation as part of the American Academy of Religion meeting in Montreal on November 6, 2009, in partnership with Emmanuel College and Union United Church.
- Sounding the Bamboo, a conference for racialized women, to be held in 2010.
- More Franchises - A Second Cup, planned for June, 2010, organized in partnership with Emmanuel College.

In Closing

I hope the material in this report will be helpful to you. If you have questions about this report, or about any of the work being done, I would be happy to discuss them with you.

Peace and blessings,

Nora Sanders
General Secretary, General Council