

MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNITED CHURCH THROUGH NON-CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

Origin: [Regional Council Name]

1. What is the issue?

We believe God/Jesus/Holy Spirit is calling us to:

- be flexible, innovative and inclusive when it comes to welcoming people into the church family.
- live out the intention of enabling diverse expressions of the church beyond the congregational model, as was the intention of GC43 when it created a category of ministry for communities of faith that are not congregations.
- find new ways of reaching people who are seeking to explore and develop their faith, deepen their spirituality.

2. Why is this issue important?

Throughout our gospels, when Pharisees challenge Jesus when he appears to fail at following the strict interpretation of the law, Jesus offers a new way of understanding the issue by highlighting the underlying purpose of the rule rather than the letter of the law.

Membership in the United Church of Canada is an important way in which people express their belonging to Christ's way. In order to become a full member of the United Church of Canada, one must do so through a congregation.

At GC43, we made the decision to broaden our understanding of ministry so that we were not limited to the traditional congregational model. The concept of "Communities of Faith" was introduced in our manual to provide flexibility and innovation. However, full membership in the United Church of Canada can only be conferred by congregations.

Membership in a community of faith that is not a congregation does not provide membership in the broader church. This creates limitations for those who come to the church through new forms of ministry. They can not be delegates to Regional or General Council, become Licensed Lay Worship Leaders, or discern calls to ministry if they have not become members in a traditional congregational setting. Without the ability to create full members of the United Church, a community of faith will have trouble to call a minister or form a church council.

Growth of the church's reach is vital to our future. That growth will come through innovative and new forms of ministry that may or may not take the shape of a congregation. Where a new ministry initiative expresses an interest in creating and shaping new members of the church, they should be encouraged to do so.

All communities of faith are required to have covenants with their Regional Councils. If a community of faith that is not a congregation wishes to be empowered to recognize new, full members into the denomination, such authorities should be permitted by the manual.

While we are certain that all communities of faith will want to welcome and shape new disciples of Christ, only some will want the authority to create full members of the United Church of Canada. Therefore, since all communities of faith are required to have covenants with their Regional Councils, the delegation of such authorities should be outlined in such covenants for the communities of faith where this is understood to be part of its ministry. Such covenants should also stipulate how the community of faith will meet the needs of a historic roll/membership list.

3. How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitments on equity?

In recent years, a number of new Francophone ministry projects have emerged in Toronto, Montréal, Sherbooke, Québec City, Winnipeg, and online. Half of these new ministries can point to African migrant roots as the source of their growth and development.

As these communities have evolved, their attachment to the United Church has also grown. Many of these cultural communities find the distinction of participant, adherent and full member baffling and feel a sense of exclusion if their community of faith cannot provide them with a full connection to the denomination.

Who has been consulted in the development of the proposal? Was the proposal developed "with" people, or "on behalf of" people? What might be the impact of this proposal on people and communities? Who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by this approach?

This proposal comes out of the direct experience of two new communities of faith who have struggled with this issue: the Ministère protestant francophone de Toronto and Église Sainte-Claire (an online ministry).

4. How might the General Council respond to the issue?

The (regional council) proposes that the General Council could:

Amend the manual to provide communities of faith that are not congregations the ability to welcome new full members to the United Church of Canada by baptism, confirmation or profession of faith.

5. For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to info@generalcouncil44.ca.