

## **GS 63 RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE USE OF THE WORD “MISSION”**

**Origin: General Secretary**

### **1. What is the issue? (describe in broad terms)**

We believe the church is called to wrestle with the legacy of its theology around mission, particularly with respect to the ways in which a colonial theology of mission guided the church’s participation in colonization in Canada, in relation to Indigenous peoples and communities, as well as in its participation in global missionary and colonizing endeavours. The use of the word “mission” is common within the United Church and in ecumenical circles and it can be a trigger for those who have borne the brunt of missionizing efforts that were really about cultural and physical genocide.

### **2. Why is this issue important?**

This issue is important because the use of the word “mission” points to a larger concern about the theologies underlying the United Church’s historic practices named as mission activities. Whether or not the United Church continues to use the word “mission,” the church is called to understand, explore, and learn more about the theologies that undergird a particular expression of mission, and to continue to decolonize our theologies so that we might live into our Truth and Reconciliation, Calls to the Church, and anti-racism commitments and aspirations.

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### **3. How might the General Council Executive respond to the issue?**

The General Secretary recommends that the General Council Executive:

- a) direct the General Secretary to develop theological, educational, and worship resources to engage the church in discussion, learning, and action around the histories, theologies, and practices of mission within the church, with a specific focus on naming and deconstructing those theologies and practices that contributed to harm, inequity, and colonization. Further, that the differences in the histories, theologies, and practices of mission overseas and domestically be named. In developing these resources, the General Secretary will ensure a particular focus on resources that can be used by local communities of faith and individuals connected to the United Church;
  - b) encourage all councils of the church to use the word “mission” less and to use it with careful consideration, guided by a “hermeneutic of suspicion” (Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza), which invites us to raise questions about the assumptions, underlying theologies, and unconscious biases we bring to our understanding of “mission;” and
  - c) encourage the church to continue to prioritize its decolonization work, through concrete, structural changes that are needed to address the continued inequity and harm that has happened, and continues to happen, through the church’s participation in colonization. The church is particularly encouraged to deconstruct its participation in colonization that was masked with the word “mission.”
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#### **4. What will be the impact?**

This work aligns with the Anti-Racism Action Plan, the Caretakers' Calls to the Church, the United Church's commitment to UNDRIP as a framework for reconciliation.

This work aligns with the following activities in the strategic plan:

- S1.02.009 "Theology: increase shift from white Euro-centric male dominant theology, encourage existing and new theologies that promote multiple marginalized identities and intercultural practices, and develop relevant accessible theological resources."
- S6.01.004 "Theologies/Spiritualities: recover, restoration and development of Indigenous ways of being and knowing, including theologies and spiritual practices. \*connected to S1.02.009 on theology."
- S1.02.007 "Education: Develop and implement educational strategy that deepens understanding of the diverse impacts of colonialism, White supremacy, and racism in our church). . ."
- S1.01.001 "Advocacy: Deepen understanding and action on the ongoing colonial injustices identified in the TRC Calls to Action and MMIWG Calls to Justice by contributing to advocacy on TRC 1-6 as well as Calls to Action directed to the Churches and Parties to the Settlement Agreement."
- S1.01.004 "Legacy: Support the relational, funding, and archival work related to Bringing the Children Home and develop further specific responses to denomination's colonial legacy as discerned to be appropriate (e.g., sixties scoop, day schools)."
- S2.02.003 "Reimagine theological education: Create regular process for schools to collaborate together around needs the church and the schools see for ministry in church today and in future (e.g., exploration of collaborative ministry and bivocational models, distinct roles of church and schools, accessibility and pedagogy, distance education)..."

There will be staff time and a small budget needed in order to animate existing resources and create some new resources (primarily thinking bible study resources to engage exploration of some key biblical passages. This may mean asking some people to write short resources and offering honouraria). However, much of the staff time can be accounted for in the strategic plan activities noted above.

The hope is that all of the United Church will become more aware, as the church continues to live into its commitments and continues to engage the legacy of its past.

#### **5. How does this proposal help us live into the commitments on equity?**

As above.

#### **6. For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council Executive:**

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal?

**If this proposal is in response to assigned work – either from General Council or a previous GCE meeting, please list proposal / motion numbers.**

Issues related to the use of the word “mission” were named at the November 2021 GCE meeting, both in discussion and in the report from the Just Peace Task Group, “In Support Of Just Peace In Palestine And Israel: A Call To Costly Solidarity”

GCE requested that the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee do some work on the use of the word “mission.” The General Secretary approved a suggestion that a working group be created, made up of members from TICIF, the Anti-Racism Common Table, and the Indigenous Church.