

**Leaside United Church**  
and  
**Presteign-Woodbine United Church**  
**Winter and Spring 2017**

**The Remits: What are they and what are we doing about them?**

During the summer of 2015 was the 42<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the United Church of Canada's General Council. There were many proposals discussed and voted on at the time, and some of them were about significant enough changes to the church that they require what are called remits. There are 5 remits that all congregations and presbyteries across Canada are being asked to discuss and vote on – four by the end of June 2017 and one by the end of February 2018.

The votes on the remits must be done by the Council (or governing body). Since we will be a new congregation before the end of June, the official vote must be by the new congregation's council, and will take place between June 10 and June 30. However, given the significance of the topics, we would like to hear from anyone who is interested in the two congregations. Are our congregations generally in favour or opposed to these remits? What are our concerns? What are we excited about? Where do we see new possibilities?

There will be four remit discussions for our congregations, held after church on the first Sunday of each month between now and the council vote:

- March 5**    *(Remit 2: The Elimination of Transfer and Settlement)*
- April 2**    *(Remit 1: Three Council Model)*
- May 7**     *(Remit 3: Office of Vocation)*
- June 4**    *(Remit 4: A New Funding Model)*

The March 5 conversation will occur during each congregation's Annual General Meeting, while the others will be as a townhall directly following the service. At the end of each townhall, we will ask the congregations for a show of support or opposition that will help inform the council's vote. The fifth and final remit will be discussed by the congregation and voted on by council next fall.

This package includes summaries of the four remits we will be discussing this spring. To read more detailed material on the remits, including extensive background material and Q&As, please visit the website: <http://www.gc42.ca/remits> If you are able, please take some time to read this package and think about the remits prior to each townhall meeting.

A few details to note:

- These remits will pass if a majority of all congregations and a majority of all presbyteries vote in favour. A congregation or presbytery that does not vote has its vote count as a “no” – so it is important we decide what we want our vote to be.
- We cannot change these motions; we can only vote yes or no. Prior to these motions being passed by General Council there was a consultation process that engaged many congregations, presbyteries, and conferences across the country.

### **Remits: Why I Care**

(Responses from some local ministers)

“At this time, we have a chance to shape the future of our church, not since 1925 when the UCC was first formed, have we had this opportunity. The remits are asking us to make decisions about the structure and future of our church. For me this means that I have input into what the church I choose to serve will look like in the next 30, even 50 years. It is a chance to ask questions like, who is the church and what is its mission? Over the next year, we have the time to discuss our dreams and hopes for our congregations, communities and the whole Body of Christ. So I care, I care deeply about our church and I hope you will join us in this important work.”

“As someone who has benefited from a lifelong weaving of my story with that of the UCC and is new to ministry here, I am an outsider to the remit process. The more I read though, the more it confirms my former view, from outside looking in, that the UCC has a culture of possibility. I am grateful to be part of a family that welcomes and struggles with questions and dreams out loud. The remits have the potential to lay a foundation for an agile community of faith, a conversation I want to be part of.”

“We know the world and Canada have changed. Without changing the church as well, how can we embrace the dynamic possibilities of ministry in our 21st century context with vision and engagement? Regardless of the remit results, the church structure will change. Will we be active in shaping the change ahead, or through inaction or indifference allow change to be forced on us? I would like my voice to be a part of this conversation and my vote to be informed and hopeful, rather than the automatic “no” that results if a congregation does not take the time to reflect and vote. I hope you do as well.”

“It is part of our tradition that we discern carefully a responsible approach to stewardship. The remits presented to us exemplify this tradition and commitment. Our engagement with the process demonstrates a courageous and mindful respect for good stewardship. It also models integrity. We are living out our faith authentically as we let go of old structures and embrace new forms of ministry. Upcoming generations will hopefully be less encumbered by our former structures and allowed freedom and flexibility to build and nurture community in new and creative ways.”

## The Remit Questions

*For summaries of each of the first four remits, see the following pages.*

*For additional background material and Q&As on all the remits, please visit: <http://www.gc42.ca/remits>*

### *Remit 1: Three Council Model*

Does the pastoral charge agree that:

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

### *Remit 2: Elimination of Transfer and Settlement*

Does the pastoral charge agree that:

- (a) the processes of transfer and settlement for members of the order of ministry within the United Church be eliminated, including the elimination of the General Council Transfer Committee; and that
- (b) the Basis of Union be amended to reflect this change?

### *Remit 3: Office of Vocation*

Does the pastoral charge agree that:

- (c) a denominational office of vocation be established in the structure of the United Church, with responsibilities and structure as approved by the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council 2015; and that
- (d) the Basis of Union be amended to reflect this change?

### *Remit 4: A New Funding Model*

Does the pastoral charge agree to a new funding model for the United Church with the budgeting process guided by the following principles?

- (1) use Mission and Service to fund ministry and mission activities;
- (2) fund governance and support services of other courts/councils by assessing communities of faith/pastoral charges
- (3) share assessments equitably across the whole church
- (4) permit Conferences/presbyteries/regional councils to use additional resources for regional purposes; and
- (5) encourage sharing of all resources across the church.

### ***Looking ahead to the fall, the last remit to be discussed is:***

#### *Remit 6: One Order of Ministry*

Does the presbytery/pastoral charge agree that there should be one new order of ministry encompassing the present categories of recognized designated lay ministers, diaconal ministers, and ordained ministers, with ordination to the ministry of word, sacrament, education, service and pastoral care as the single rite of entry, and with provision for the continued identity of the diakonia within the ordained ministry?

## Summary of Remit 1: The Three Council Model

### Background

- In the UCC, we are organised on a conciliar model where there are different levels or "courts." There are currently four courts: the council or governing body of a congregation or pastoral charge, presbyteries, conferences and General Council. These were inherited from our founding denominations, congregations (Congregationalist), Presbyteries (Presbyterian) and Conferences (Methodist) with the General Council operating as the national body of the UCC.
- The Comprehensive Review Task Group, created at General Council 41 (2013), proposed the 3 council structure after a yearlong nationwide consultation.

### Summary of this Remit

- This remit would move from a Four Court to a Three Council model with:
  1. Communities of Faith  
These would include current congregations but may include new forms in the future such as outreach ministries.
  2. Regional Councils  
These would replace presbyteries and conferences.
  3. Denominational Council  
This would replace the current General Council.
- Communities of Faith would also be encouraged to form informal "clusters" (local) and "networks" (larger-scale, based on interest) to work on common interests, mission and support. Many communities are already doing this, for example joint youth events.

### Possible Positives

- The current model is not sustainable both in terms of financial and people resources, the proposed system is intended to be more flexible, sustainable, simplified and to reflect the increasingly diverse nature of ministry within the UCC. Redefining congregations as communities of faith allows space to image different ways to be church in 21<sup>st</sup> century Canada.
- This would avoid redundancy/extra paperwork that sometimes currently exists between presbyteries and conferences.

### Possible Drawbacks

- Because creation of and participation in clusters and networks are at the initiative of individual ministers and congregations, some people believe that the new model would contribute to a sense of isolation for ministers and congregations.
- Although the exact number of regional councils is not known, there will be far fewer than the current number of presbyteries, there would be longer travel times for meetings and resources/staff people would be further from the existing communities. (In Toronto, the impact might not be felt very much since we're relatively small. In some presbyteries there are already substantial travel times, so the impact may not be felt very much since air travel would already be required).

## Summary of Remit 2: Elimination of Transfer and Settlement

### Background

- It used to be the case that Settlement was required for anyone who was first ordained. The new minister was settled in a pastoral charge somewhere in Canada. This was arranged by a committee who matched ministers and churches. Some ministers appreciated the challenge and new learnings. Others found it disrupted family life and isolated them from support networks.
- At a meeting of General Council, it was decided that settlement would no longer be required. Someone being ordained or commissioned could request transfer and settlement, or seek a call or appointment themselves. Since that decision the number of individuals choosing transfer and settlement, as well as the number of churches asking for transfer and settlement has been very low.

### Summary of this Remit

- In somewhat basic terms, this proposed change would put the search for and selection of ministers to serve congregations clearly in the hands of the congregation and the clergy themselves – as distinct from the present nominal practice (indicated to be effectively honoured primarily in the breach) of placements being determined by Presbyteries, Conferences and General Council committees.

### Possible Positives

- Evidence apparently is that direct involvement of congregations and ministers in the search and placement process is more or less pervasive in practice currently such that this change seems to be more a matter of confirming what works now than a designed change in process as such.
- The advantage would be simplification and streamlining (less committee work) based on the changed needs when settlement is not mandatory.

### Possible Drawbacks

- While this process seems to make sense for many congregations – particularly in urban and like places – there may be challenges for rural and remote place congregations relative to finding pastors prepared to serve in the somewhat constrained environments that may exist in such cases.
- There may also be challenges for ministers who might face implicit discrimination when applying to churches themselves – the transfer and settlement process could help identify churches and ensure the minister finds work (possible instances might include ministers with differing abilities, ministers who are LGBTQ+, ministers who have English as a second language, etc.)

## Summary of Remit 3: Office of Vocation

### Background

- The responsibility for vocational matters (essentially, recruiting, training and overseeing) has been shared by congregations, presbyteries and conferences. With a reduction in volunteers and a need for consistency in the development and supervision of effective leadership, it has been proposed that a primary Office of Vocation be established at the General Council level with support and oversight also provided at the Conference (or Regional) level.

### Summary of this Remit

- The Office of Vocation would be overseen by an elected body honouring and living into intercultural mission and ministry, consisting of a balance of ministers (ordained, diaconal, or designated lay ministers) and lay people.
- The Office of Vocation would have a Board of 12-16 (including ministers and lay people with relevant skills). Its responsibilities would be to:
  - ◆ Establish standards for education, training, admissions and accreditation
  - ◆ Decide whether a candidate is ordained, commissioned or recognized
  - ◆ Provide oversight of candidates and ministry personnel
  - ◆ Provide oversight for disciplinary processes such as conduct reviews, makes recommendations, convenes ad hoc formal hearing panels
  - ◆ Initiate investigations around concerns or complaints against ministry personnel
  - ◆ Maintain a registry of accredited personnel, Interim Ministers and those trained for the Ministry of Supervision
  - ◆ Establish and implement standards for admitting ministers from other denominations and readmitting ministers
- The Conferences or Regional Councils would:
  - ◆ Assessment boards, made up of volunteers, assess the fitness of candidates and recommend to the Office of Vocation
  - ◆ Accompany candidates and provide support during the discernment and formation process
  - ◆ Support their local pastoral relationships

### Questions to consider

- Is streamlining, and centralizing the process an advantage or a disadvantage?
- Does higher levels of training and experience offset less local knowledge and relationships?
- How would a change to this system impact the evaluation of the beliefs of ministers and their fitness for ministry? Would this be a positive or a negative?
- What are our congregations' experiences of the current structure? How might this change?

## Summary of Remit 4: A New Funding Model

### Summary

- The approval of this remit would change the way that pastoral charges are assessed in the United Church. It would give the General Council the ability to assess pastoral charges to cover the costs of governance and support services for the denomination.

### Background (the current funding model)

- Currently, General Council (our National Administration) is funded through Mission & Service, donations, and investments held in reserve. General Council does not have the power to assess.
- At this time, presbyteries and conferences assess pastoral charges and to cover their expenses. Conferences are also funded through grants from the General Council.
- Under the current model assessment is based on membership. There are approximately 30 different models of assessment being used across the United Church of Canada.

### What Would Be Changing with the New Model?

- Under the new model, the Mission & Service fund would no longer be used to fund the governance of the denomination. Mission & Service donations would go exclusively to the missions and ministries of the church.
- General Council would use assessments to fund governance and administration.
- In the new model assessment would be based on the income of pastoral charges and communities of faith.
- This change comes out of a commitment to be responsible stewards of church resources. All funds would go towards the governance and operation of the denomination. The amount received would dictate the amount spent.

### How would assessments be determined?

- The proposed assessment that each pastoral charge or community of faith would pay to the national church would be 4.5% of its net income.
- The level of assessment would be decided at the denominational council or General Council meetings.
- The amount would be calculated by taking the total revenue and subtracting the Mission & Service funding raised by the congregation, Mission & Service raised by the UCW, other church appeals, other outreach, bequests and asset sales, then, multiplying the final net revenue by 0.045. In short: Givings, interest from investments and rental incomes will be assessed; outreach and capital assets will be exempt.
- Under this new model, regional bodies could also choose to assess pastoral charges.

### How could this affect a congregation?

- In 2015, a church in Toronto Southeast Presbytery of 350 members with income of \$375,000 paid approximately \$12,400 in combined Presbytery/Conference assessments. Under the new model, that same church would pay \$16,875. As part of the phasing in of the new model, no church would be expected to increase their payment by more than 10% in any given year. This church of 350 would be expected to pay \$13,640 (\$12,400 + 10%) the first year. (The 10% phase in cap would last for 3 years).
- A church could lower their payments by increasing M&S and outreach givings.

#### Possible Positives

- Clarity around where M&S givings are going. Assessments rather than donations supporting governance and administration work.
- The new model would streamline assessment and make it more equitable.
- Under this new model, all pastoral charges will bear a fair share of funding both regional and national support and governance work. Larger congregations with limited financial resources will be able to dedicate funds to local ministry.

#### Possible Drawbacks

- Assessments being determined at a denominational level could increase a perception of separation from the decision making.
- Assessments will go up, at least in the short term

#### Other Factors

- Similar assessment models are used in protestant mainline churches. The Anglican church assesses ministry sites for more than 25%. (Locally, the assessment for 2016 was 27%)
- The current funding system is not sustainable. There are already significant cuts that have been made at General Council over the past several years. Regardless of what funding model is used there will be increasing assessments, declining staffing, or both. The question is not if things will change, but whether we think this is a better model for the changes ahead.

*Thank you for your time and attention  
as we think about the future of our church!*