

# GCE SUMMARY, SEPT. 22-23, 2023

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The General Council Executive (GCE) met virtually Sept. 22–23, 2023. Each day, the GCE began by committing to **Equity Aspirations** (About Anti-Racism webpage > Downloads) and Holy Manners. On both days, the Moderator grounded the meeting in worship, with reflections on Psalm 23. She also shared a hymn in French, “**En Toi, ma confiance**” by Emmanuel Music, and Bobby McFerrin’s a capella choir singing **23rd Psalm**.

The two-day meeting was punctuated by equity check-ins from the equity team, prayer and reflection. Highlights from the meeting include the following:

# Principles-based Justice

Following on the decisions of GC44, and the commitment of the General Secretary, the Executive received proposed principles to guide The United Church of Canada's justice work. Jennifer Janzen-Ball, Executive Minister for Theology and Ministry Leadership presented work of the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee (TCIF) in developing a principles-based approach to justice aligned with policies, affirmations, and commitments that the church has already made. The principles are intentionally interdependent and written primarily to guide the work of the national staff and national committees, but not limited to it.

The seven principles are equal in value; the working group did not assign how the principles are applied, but urged they be tested over the next year-and-a-half:

- Anti-oppression
- Truth-telling
- Holistic scope
- Respect for human dignity
- Full participation and decolonization
- Equity, mutuality, respect, and reparations
- Costly and prophetic solidarity

All three related recommendations were passed: the principles were adopted in principle; the proposal will be sent to General Council for discussion and decision Oct. 21, 2023, and further conversation with the Indigenous Church will discuss ways to include the seven sacred teachings in the principles document.

# Leadership for the 2020s

In further work from GC43, five proposals presented to the GCE about eliminating functional distinctions between Designated Lay Ministers and Ordered Ministry were all carried, and will be presented to the General Council for discussion and decision on Oct. 21, 2023. The proposals addressed:

- Current DLMs and DLM candidates;
- A pathway to Testamur;
- The responsibilities of regional councils;
- Future candidates without undergraduate degrees, and finally,
- Those who retired as DLMs.

The proposal strongly urges regional councils to review their practices around eligibility and licensing to people who retired as DLMs, since these are executed unevenly across the country.

## Former mission properties in the Democratic Republic of Korea

The General Council Executive supported a proposal to renounce claims to former mission properties owned by the United Church in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (also known as North Korea). The request for the renunciation came from the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK).

In 2021, the PROK passed a declaration outlining a request for claims to ownership of property left behind in the North to be renounced, as a concrete step towards reconciliation. It also calls upon the churches in South Korea to curtail plans for described by

the PROK as “imperialistic” mission of North Korean society; since the time of the Korean war, many church denominations in South Korea have drawn up plans for aggressive re-evangelization of the North.

## **Operational Plan Quarterly Report**

The GCE received the second quarter report on the GCO’s strategic plan. This quarter included key changes to General Council units for stronger alignment with the plan. The Q2 results of the operational plan are consistent with Q1 in making solid progress on the strategic objectives.

About 35% of the activities have fully met their planned key results for this quarter with 100% completion. The average completion of key results in activated areas of all the activities is 77% (similar to 76% in Q1).

## **COLA and grant decisions first step in 2024 budget process**

The General Council Executive considered principles related to the 2024 General Council budget, which will be approved in November. These principles include an anticipated budget deficit not to exceed \$3.2 million, with overall grant reductions in the range of \$2.6 to \$3.3 million, following the recommendations of a grants review and global partnership review. Among these grant reductions will be a 25% cut in Mission and Service grants to regions and a 25% reduction to global partner grants.

Other aspects of the budget framework relate to the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA). The GCE made decisions regarding COLA within a context of addressing competing pressures. Fundamental to the consideration was a commitment to fairly support ministry personnel; deep concern about current pressures on local congregations, and our effort to retain the current and needed staff complement in our regional and General Council offices through 2024.

While the commitment to be a fair and decent employer remains a core value, financial sustainability needs to be factored into how the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) is administered. The GCE decided that, going forward, COLA decisions will be decoupled from the Consumer Price Index (CPI) common index of the previous year, as has been our policy. Although this is a change from an absolute link, CPI will continue to be a factor in the COLA decisions. With the commitment to compensating paid accountable personnel as well and as fairly as possible. The GCE also decided to decouple the General Council staff system from the pastoral relations staff system in decisions regarding COLA.

After deep and thoughtful deliberations, the GCE decided that staff in the General Council system would receive 2% COLA in 2024. Retaining the practice of aligning COLA with CPI this year for staff could have triggered layoffs, or deeper grant cuts.

Ministry personnel will receive 6.3% in 2024, which is in line with CPI indicator. However, the decisions give notice that such an outcome—COLA automatically reflecting CPI—is not to be expected in subsequent years.

The General Council mandated the establishment of a Total Compensation Task Group to look at all aspects of compensation within the church. Its findings, based on data analysis on regional and equity bases and comparisons to other sectors, will help

guide future practice as we seek to balance fair, equitable compensation and the sustainability for communities of faith. An interim report was requested, to help guide decisions for 2025, by fall of 2024.

## Code of Conduct policy

The General Council Executive adopted an updated policy addressing conduct, which was last updated in February 2020. While there is no change to the existing policy, the update provides clarity around conduct standards, and aligns those expectations to the guiding principles as defined in the Call and Vision, the Core Competency framework and relevant legislation.

## Pension and benefits

Core group health and dental benefits, and life insurance, remain unchanged, except for long-term disability (LTD); the cost of LTD decreased for employees by 10% to 2.33% of pensionable earnings.

To review the proposals and reports provided for the GCE for this meeting, go to [commons.united-church.ca](https://commons.united-church.ca) > Governance > General Council Executive > GC44 Executive (2022-2025) > Meeting Documents > 2023-09-22-23 GCE.