

## **GENERAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS**

Thom Davies and Lewis Coffman, Hamilton Conference representatives to the General Council Executive, offer these highlights as their written report to the 87th Annual Meeting of Hamilton Conference. They will answer your questions and give a further verbal report during the Annual Meeting.

### **SUMMARY OF MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE OF GENERAL COUNCIL, NOVEMBER 13-15, 2010**

The Executive of the General Council met Nov. 13-15, 2010 at the General Council Office in Toronto. This document summarizes some of the key decisions of the Executive, which acts on behalf of the General Council between General Council meetings and generally meets twice a year.

The Executive is composed of 50 voting members elected from across the country. Members are lay or ministry personnel, and represent all 13 Conferences, francophone, ethnic, and Aboriginal constituencies, and various national committees.

#### **General Council Office Accommodations**

The Task Group on General Council Accommodation presented its final report. It offered four options for the location of the General Council Office after its current lease expires on Jan. 31, 2015:

- Moving the General Council Office to Winnipeg.
- Moving the General Council Office to Ottawa, with the possibility of shared space with ecumenical partners.
- Relocating to a proposed redevelopment of Bloor Street United Church in Toronto.
- Renewing the lease at 3250 Bloor St. W., Toronto, or leasing similar office space in Toronto.

These options reflected expressions of interest that were received by the task group, which was mandated by the Executive to consider the General Council Office's future office accommodations. The task group did background work on each of the four options. In addition, a real estate consultant was retained to assess the General Council Office's space requirements, real estate market conditions in each of the three cities, and the potential costs of each option.

The Executive spent considerable time at the meeting discussing the options and the criteria against which they should be assessed. Members identified denominational identity and connection, financial considerations, and environmental concerns as key considerations in choosing future office accommodation.

The Executive voted to establish by the end of December 2010 a working group composed of as many as five members of the Executive. The working group will prepare a report for the May 2011 meeting of the Executive that will review all the options and analyze the data provided by the task group. The working group will make a recommendation on the viability of each option, and may decide to rank the options. It may also explore alternative options that emerge during the course of its work.

The Executive thanked the task group for its service to the church.

### **Remit on Doctrine**

The Executive voted to direct the General Secretary to send the remit on doctrine to presbyteries and pastoral charges in three separate questions, one for each of the 1940 Statement of Faith, A New Creed, and A Song of Faith. This remit was authorized in August 2009 by the 40th General Council after the Council approved a motion to add to the Doctrine section currently in the Basis of Union these three doctrinal statements, which General Councils of the United Church have approved since 1925.

For more information about the remit, see the study document titled Our Words of Faith at [www.united-church.ca/beliefs/statements/our-words-of-faith](http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/statements/our-words-of-faith).

### **Integrated Fundraising Initiatives**

The Executive received a report prepared by KMA Consultants on an integrated fundraising strategy for the United Church. It also approved a special legacy campaign, to be launched in 2011, which will seek bequests to support the work of the United Church.

The Executive directed the General Secretary to test ways a proposed fundraising mechanism known tentatively as “United Cares” could be used to help bring renewed focus and energy to the overall fundraising efforts of the United Church, and to offer a recommendation at the May 2011 meeting of the Executive about whether to implement such a mechanism. The proposed fundraising mechanism, which the Executive first considered in May 2010, would allow donors to direct gifts to specific areas of the church’s work.

### **National Aboriginal Day**

The Executive directed the General Secretary to take steps to urge federal and provincial governments to make National Aboriginal Day (June 21) a statutory holiday, including drafting a petition for use by United Church members and adherents. The General Secretary was also directed to consider and implement measures to recognize National Aboriginal Day, which could include establishing it as a paid day off for General Council Office and Conference staff when June 21 falls on a week day.

## **Residential Schools Steering Committee**

The Executive directed that the Residential Schools Steering Committee be renamed the Committee on Indigenous Justice and Residential Schools. The new name reflects a broadened mandate that covers related work in relation to other forms of injustice so the Committee can assist the church to live out its apologies, working in partnership with the Aboriginal Ministries Council.

## **Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel**

Steve Longmoore, chair of the Task Group on Demographics of Ministry Personnel, joined the meeting by web conference from New Brunswick and explained the task group's key findings. The Executive accepted the task group's report and approved the implementation of its recommendations, including referring a recommendation for a national recruitment strategy to the Steering Group on Recruitment.

## **The Peace Policy of the United Church**

The Executive directed that the "Peace Policy" it passed in November 2008 be renamed "The Responsibility to Protect." It decided to take no action on the remaining parts of a proposal titled "The Peace Policy of the United Church," which the 40th General Council had referred to the Executive.

## **KAIROS Palestine Document**

The Executive received A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering, also known as the KAIROS Palestine document, as an authentic voice of Palestinian Christians. It offered the document, and responses to it, to United Church Conferences, presbyteries, congregations, and community ministries to use in their ongoing consultation, dialogue, study, and prayer, as part of the implementation of the directions of the 40th General Council in M&O 7 Implementation of Measures Towards Peace in the Middle East. It also directed the General Secretary to make available the KAIROS Palestine document, and such responses and guidance, as she deems helpful.

The KAIROS Palestine document, which was issued by Palestinian Christian leaders in late 2009, calls for a just peace in Israel/Palestine. (Note that the word KAIROS is a Greek word referring to a moment of great opportunity, and that the origin of this document is not connected to the Canadian interchurch group that is also known as KAIROS.)

## **Planning for the 41st General Council**

The Executive approved the dates of the 41st General Council, which will be held from Saturday, August 11 to Saturday, August 18, 2012 at Carleton University in Ottawa. It also approved guiding principles for the Council.

The Executive approved the over-all budget for the 41st General Council. The discussion emphasized the importance of strong youth participation in the meeting, and the Executive

encouraged the 41st General Council Planning Committee to make every effort to manage the budget to allow a Youth Forum presence as strong in numbers as at the 40th General Council (funding for one youth per presbytery), along with adequate leadership.

### **Nominations**

The Executive approved the report of the Nominations Committee, which met Nov. 11 and 12, 2010 to select leaders for the church using practices of spiritual discernment. A total of 32 appointments or reappointments were recommended for the committees and task groups of the General Council. Five vacancies remain unfilled; additional nominations will be sought for these vacancies.

Of particular note, 19 people were appointed to the new Communities in Mission Unit Wide Committee, including four members age 30 or younger, one member who is engaged in youth and young adult ministry, and members connected with Ministries in French and ethnic ministries.

Members were also named to the Permanent Committee on Finance's new Investment Sub-Committee, which, among other things, will look at responsible investment.

### **Budget Plan Towards 2013**

The Executive adopted the document titled Towards 2013 as the budget for 2011 and the three-year plan for 2011-13. The document shows a balanced budget over the three years. Many of the cost-saving measures included in the budget have already been announced as part of the planning process.

### **National Liability Insurance Policy**

The Executive directed the General Secretary to expand the United Church's national insurance program to include directors' and officers' coverage at the congregational level. This coverage protects staff and volunteers from personal liability arising out of actual or alleged negligence, errors, misstatements, or breach of duty in their oversight responsibilities. Key exposures include liability arising from wrongful dismissal, employment practices, contractual obligations, and the general safety and well-being of church employees and members.

### **Responsible Investment**

The Executive acknowledged the work of the Pension Board on responsible investment and directed it to continue work on a responsible investment policy document. It referred to the Sub-Executive of the General Council a proposal that the Nominations Committee take into consideration expertise in corporate social responsibility when appointing members-at-large to the Pension Board. Charlie Black, chair of the Pension Board, reported on a wide range of initiatives the Board is undertaking as part of its responsible investment practice, including: the establishment of a Responsible Investment Task Group; the continued engagement of a company specializing in investment research and support for institutional and professional social investors; the orientation of Board members to responsible investment principles and practices and possible actions for the

Plan; the engagement of a proxy voting service; the engagement of the management of flagged companies (currently Goldcorp Inc.) through a professional engagement provider; regular meetings with existing investment managers to ensure they take responsible investment considerations into account; and consultation with other denominations on their responsible investment practices.

### **Transfer and Settlement Incentives**

The Executive referred back to the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services a proposal to provide a once-in-a-lifetime moving allowance to ministry personnel who are initially settled in a pastoral charge and who accept a subsequent call or appointment in The United Church of Canada. Questions were asked about what incentives other denominations offer to ministry personnel who agree to settlement.

A working group of the Permanent Committee began considering financial incentives for candidates for the Order of Ministry who agree to transfer and settlement after transfer and settlement became optional on July 1, 2010 as a result of the approval of Remit 3. This change in the United Church's policy on transfer and settlement will apply for the first time to candidates for the Order of Ministry who are recommended for ordination or commissioning to diaconal ministry in 2011.

### **Counselling by Ministry Personnel**

The Executive adopted guidelines for counselling by ministry personnel. These guidelines recognize that the role of ministry personnel in pastoral ministry is complex and demands a broad range of skills, knowledge, and competency. Pastoral counsel is a regular part of pastoral ministry. Longer-term counselling, however, requires specialist competency that is above and beyond the scope of the normal pastoral practice. The guidelines distinguish between the two and identify boundaries for use in regular pastoral ministry.

### **Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Policy**

The Executive received a report on the evaluation of the Sexual Abuse Policy, confirming the effectiveness of the substantive changes adopted in 2007. Following the leadership of Saskatchewan Conference, the policy name has been changed to "Sexual Abuse Prevention and Response Policy." A further review will be undertaken in three to five years.

### **Maternity and Parental Leave Policies**

The Executive adopted new maternity and parental leave policies that provide improved clarity and consistency to both pastoral relations and General Council Office systems. The maternity leave policies provide an employment insurance income top-up to 95 percent of the weekly rate of pay for a period of 15 weeks. The parental leave policy provides the same top up for up to 8 weeks of a 35 week leave.