

PROPOSAL TO SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL #2020-01

Title: INTERCULTURAL DIVERSITY COMMISSION
for Shining Waters Regional Council

Original Source: Intercultural Diversity Circle September 2020

PURPOSE

The Intercultural Diversity Commission will “encourage and engage the Shining Waters Regional Council and its Executive in honouring and living into intercultural mission and ministry” (The Manual C.2.4.d.).

WHY A COMMISSION

The Manual

C. Regional Council

C.3.3. Commission

C.3.3.1. A regional council may appoint one or more United Church members as a commission...

a) to take on a specific responsibility for the regional council or its executive; and

b) to make decisions on behalf of the regional council or its executive.

The journey toward becoming an intercultural denomination has been a long time coming. Ethnic ministries committees, multicultural consultations, ethnic rallies and dinners, ecumenical and interfaith committees, studies, and reports have all been part of the former Toronto Conference journey to become intercultural.

When the 41st General Council (2012) adopted “A Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church”, it recommended this vision to its various levels for study and reflection, and to encourage them to “integrate aspects of this vision into their mission and ministry.” In 2019, the vision was explicitly included in The Manual 2019 in all three levels or councils: B. Community of Faith B.2.1.1.f.; C. Regional Council C.2.4.d; and D. General Council D.2.3.e.

The specific responsibility for becoming an intercultural church requires dedicated work of long-term commitment, action, and visibility. We cannot *be* an intercultural Church without the hard work of *becoming* together. “We (the United Church) are not a culture looking for more diversity; we are incomplete looking to become more whole.”¹

An intercultural Church is an intentional, justice-seeking Church. It keeps finding new and anti-racist ways to share resources, redress imbalances of power, and challenge unfair systems. It faithfully addresses racism and White culture privilege. It honours and strengthens cultural ethnic, and linguistic communities of faith to grow spiritually within their own cultural contexts without expecting assimilation. It recognizes the churches’ participation in historic injustices. It strives to do things equitably from non-dominant perspectives. It is missional. It thinks globally and locally.

Shining Waters Regional Council covers one of the most racially, culturally, and ethnically diverse regions in the country; many of our communities, neighborhoods, and workplaces are already intercultural. Yet, the culture and operational systems of our regional council and

¹ Unknown source quoted by Janet Ross, former General Council Program Coordinator for Intercultural Education and Engagement, What’s Up at Church House: News from Your General Council Office, Issue 7, February 2013, p. 3.

communities of faith remain largely unchanged. The diversification of the representational appearance of its leaders in decision-making places is a start; however, it is not intercultural until each learns from the other and a different leadership culture is created based on equity.

An Intercultural Diversity Commission would be a place in the structure of Shining Waters Regional Council where the specific responsibility for deepening and enlivening the work of the intercultural vision would be visibly housed. A commission relating to the Executive and to other commissions as equal partners will enable us to have the space to discover who we really are and to live into the transformative reality of what it means for us to be The United Church of Canada.

WHAT AN INTERCULTURAL DIVERSITY COMMISSION WOULD BRING TO THE REGIONAL COUNCIL

The 2016 “Final Report of the Intercultural Ministry” from the former South West Presbytery identified that being an intercultural church is not always easy to put into action. The report identified multiple *barriers* in becoming intercultural:

- “the need to better integrate and apply leadership, knowledge, and participation in intercultural ministry”;
- “interest in forming longer standing and deeper relationships with first-generation Canadian newcomers, but challenged to know how best to do so”;
- “biases about race or culture individually and collectively as a community of faith.”

For many minorities, “ethnic” cultural communities of faith are the only places where they can safely be who they are. Worship, language, spirituality, and culture cannot be separated. By their intergenerational, linguistic, and cultural nature, these communities of faith are already intercultural in their own right and should be honoured as such.

Diversity must still be central to our faith and central to what it means for all of us to be called to be the Church and for all to feel we belong. The early church was culturally and ethnically diverse and thus intercultural from the beginning. The Spirit did not make distinctions; yet, even the early church struggled with cultural difference and discrimination in their communities.

Racialized and ethnic minority communities of faith and individuals bring particular authenticity and integrity to the work of becoming an intercultural regional council. But for generations, many have felt isolated and treated like liabilities, not as equals or recognized in the Church.

We who are seen to be racialized, biracial, cultural and/or linguistic minorities live daily experiences of marginalization and “othering” in Church and society. The regional council cannot participate in becoming an intercultural church without courageously naming and dismantling prejudice, discrimination, and racism in our midst, specifically anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Asian racism, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism. We ourselves have also learned to be prejudiced against other minorities. No culture is less than or greater than another in God’s eyes. We need to know each other’s stories and to unlearn our part as minorities in the racial hierarchy that exists in relation to the White culture.

We bring gifts of our relationships with our diverse ancestral homelands. First generation immigrants as well as their subsequent generations connect with global issues from a relational perspective, often in formal and informal relationships with global or ecumenical partners of The United Church of Canada: Anglican, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Methodist,

Presbyterian, and others. Many come from other countries and churches without formal United Church partner relations. Many also come from interfaith relations within our own families. Our faith diversity is a gift.

We believe that God has blessed and created diverse cultures and languages in diverse bodies and that we were created for relationship with God and with one another. We will continue to be changed by one another only as we live together in mutual recognition, respect, understanding of difference, and with full and equitable participation. New communities from different nations and cultures will continue to join this journey and expand our intercultural identity.

We want to be able to develop the language, wisdom, and practices necessary to make an intercultural vision a reality. We see a vision of growing in interdependence and integration within the Church, not assimilation or separation, so that we can make authentic decisions for ourselves among our diverse, minority cultures. This is neither short-term work nor work that can be done authentically from a majority culture perspective.

We don't know exactly what an intercultural Church looks like because we've never been there before. No Church has. But we have seen glimpses of hope: some churches have changed the way they welcome; some practice reciprocal relationships; some are not afraid to be vulnerable and learn from mistakes; some seek to share resources equitably.

We have faith and trust in the One who is guiding us toward this vision in Shining Waters. We take strength in Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in (YHWH) and you will be given the desires of your heart." An intercultural Church is the desire of our hearts.

WHAT AN INTERCULTURAL DIVERSITY COMMISSION WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR

The leadership for an intercultural regional council needs to come from those who live diverse cultures, not from those who learn about us and whose culture is considered the norm.

A commission would take responsibility for the movement toward becoming an intercultural denomination in the regional council by:

- a) Educating ourselves about the Church system of marginalization and our part in it through
 - i. learning to dismantle and disrupt our learned ways of relating to the (usually) White, European Church, and between one minority and another,
 - ii. embodying intercultural church amongst ourselves,
 - iii. unlearning our internalized cultural imperialism together,
 - iv. getting to know and encourage each other as minorities so that we can interact in mutual relationship and grow into ourselves,
 - v. practicing peacemaking between us,

- b) Taking the time we need together to build a common understanding and to bring a diverse yet equitable and collective voice to the intercultural growth of the regional council. Some of our members are now on the Shining Waters Regional Council Executive and other commissions, which is a step forward. We finally have place and voice at decision-making circles where in the past we have been solitary tokens, occasionally asked about our "ethnic" perspective but not having our voice affect the majority perspective. A commission will give us space to learn how to contribute to the regional council as equals, as our whole selves,

- c) Finding ways together to contribute our cultures, worship, experiences of God in ways that are respected as more than entertainment or tourism, and to learn from one another. For many of us, though not all, English is our second or third language and learned as adults. There is richness in our languages and cultures with words and concepts that have no English language equivalents such as *sankofa*,
- d) Providing spaces for our different cultural groups to learn each others' histories, stories, challenges, languages; deepening cross-race relationships and learning how our histories intersect, and learning to become intercultural with each other,
- e) Teaching our newcomers about the legacy of Indigenous peoples, residential schools, and the history of the land on which they settled, and finding respectful ways to be in relationship with Indigenous communities, particularly those on whose land the regional council settled on,
- f) Developing practical tools for minority ethnic culture communities of faith as well as predominantly White mono-cultural communities of faith, for all to first know their own cultures and biases as critical to becoming intercultural in areas such as worship, pastoral care, welcoming, meetings, and other areas of community life, drawing on the resources of the rich cultures within Shining Waters Regional Council,
- g) Becoming equipped to provide resources to the regional council Executive to become more intercultural and anti-racist in the ways it does its work,
- h) Working with other regional council commissions and committees, not as another silo or as secondary to but as equal partners in mission and ministry, encouraging other groups to work toward mutually participating in an intercultural diversity vision for the whole regional council,
- i) Nominating the commission chair or co-chairs from among our members.

