

A. JURISDICTION OF CLERGY

Origin: Shining Waters Regional Council

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

We believe God/Jesus/Holy Spirit is calling us to:

- accept that the Optional Benefits Package available to workers in the United Church of Canada is no longer sustainable.
- acknowledge that ministry personnel are ageing, experiencing more chronic illness and more stress related illnesses than the church has previously experienced
- recognize that the Conciliar system no longer functions as a balanced and supportive system for clergy within the United Church of Canada.

2. Why is this issue important?

- The United Church of Canada was founded on what was called the Conciliar system of governance in 1925. That system worked on the basis of interlinked forms of governance that was shared between clergy and lay people.
- In this time of systemic institutional decline, it is the clergy who are bearing the brunt of the effect of the dramatic changes that the church is undergoing.
- There are increasing mental health challenges, bullying and abuse of clergy, as congregational anxiety is directed at ministers.
- It is clear that the restructuring has led to greater isolation and vulnerability for those in ordered ministry.
- There is frequently little recognition of the education and expertise of ordered ministers regarding liturgy and theology.
- This crisis for the order of ministry makes difficult and painful for many existing ministry personnel and will very likely deter others from hearing or accepting a call to ministry.

3. How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitments on equity?

Over the course of several years, General Council has made the following commitments on equity.

Describe in broad terms the ways in which this proposal engages with some of these principles:

- Clergy affected by disregard are found in a variety of communities, ethnicities, cultures, gender identities and orientations, races and abilities. The diversity of clergy in the United Church is greater than it has ever been and the discounting of clergy training, expertise and gifts has never been so great.

A consultation of seventy-eight church workers supplied much of the information for this proposal.

4. How might the General Council respond to the issue?

The Shining Waters Regional Council proposes that the General Council:

- recognize that the restructuring has led to greater isolation and vulnerability for those in ordered ministry and that it create opportunities for collegiality and support.
- undertake a review of the authority of clergy to deal with bullies in the congregation, without the fear that by doing so they will lose their jobs.
- undertake a full review of the current system of local and Regional governance with respect to the support and accountability of clergy be conducted, with a focus on the challenges that ministers are currently facing in a time of systemic decline. Integral to this review will be a consultation with all ordered clergy.
- make no changes to Benefits or the Pension Plan without a consultation with all those affected.
- direct that each Region employ a chaplain whose sole job is the support of clergy.