

## **GS10 LIVING INTO RECONCILIATION**

**Origin: General Secretary, General Council**

### **1. What is the issue?**

The 43rd General Council committed itself to living out its relationship with the Indigenous church through the lens of the Caretakers Call to the Church. In October of 2019 the Annual meeting of General Council 43 approved the establishment of the National Indigenous Organization. One of the principles agreed to in that motion was that the National Indigenous Organization:

***...will function within the United Church with a balance of independence from and relationship to the General Council. There will be a structural connection between the National Indigenous Organization and the General Council Executive or other way of maintaining the relationship between them, as determined by the Indigenous Ministries Organization and approved by the General Council Executive;***

The National Indigenous Council and Elders have been evaluating and working to clarify the implication of the Calls to the Church, with the aim of helping to create new pathways for the relationship and a more equitable understanding of how settler and indigenous church can live together. That work is pointing to some necessary changes that will require a remit process which has a very colonial feel.

We believe God is calling us to develop processes for the National Indigenous Organization and the church to work together in ways that are decolonial and reflect the commitment to be in relationship that is organic and honours the spirit and history of the apologies.

### **2. Why is this issue important?**

The United Church of Canada has been on a journey towards reconciliation and right relationship with the Indigenous communities. In 1986 and 1998, the church offered its apology acknowledging its complicity to the colonial project which diminished indigenous cultures and spirituality, and its role in the residential schools' system.

The All Native Circle Conference was established in 1988. In 2006, the 39th General Council established the Aboriginal Ministries Unit/Circle. The church was an active participant in the Truth and Reconciliation process, which led to the Calls to Action to redress the legacy of residential schools.

In 2015, the church reaffirmed its commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. When the church approved the denominational restructuring that year, the Indigenous church had not yet defined its relationship with the settler church, and the 42nd General Council directed that there be continued conversations with Indigenous [Aboriginal] ministries to build a relationship based on mutuality, respect, and equity.

In 2018, the Caretakers Calls to the Church were received by the 43rd General Council. The Calls articulated the Indigenous Church's vision for the ongoing development of Indigenous Peoples' mission and ministry and communities of faith within the United Church. The General Council endorsed and committed the church to take steps towards fulfilling the Calls, including approving the creation of a National Indigenous Organization as a decision-making body within the United Church.

The church has also committed itself to becoming an antiracist denomination.

All these commitments require the church to seek to decolonize its imagination, policies and practices. A new way of engagement is essential for the relationship with the Indigenous Church.

As a key example, the Indigenous church is free to decide on its own structure, but must then obtain approval for it from the wider church through the remit process. A remit is legally necessary under The United Church of Canada Act. A more decolonized approach would be for the church to give pre-emptive remit approval for whatever the Indigenous Church determines in the future as the place it will have in the United Church, guided by the Calls to the Church. This would create space for the Indigenous Church, in its own time, to develop a nation-to-nation relationship with the settler church without the need for any further remit approvals.

Since this remit is not for a specific policy change but rather to give pre-emptive approval for what the Indigenous Church determines as its place in the United Church, the prescribed 24-month period for information sharing and study would not be as necessary and could be shortened to 12 months for this remit only.

### **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:

- adopting [the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) as the framework for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples;
- adopting the [Calls to the Church](#) from the Caretakers of our Indigenous Circle as the basis for a new relationship;
- committing to becoming [an intercultural church](#);
- [opposing discrimination](#) of any kind on the basis of identity; and
- developing an anti-racism policy and committing to becoming an [anti-racist denomination](#).

The proposal was developed in consultation with the National Indigenous Council and Indigenous Ministries and Justice staff.

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

**The General Secretary proposes that the General Council:**

- a) authorize a Category 3 remit to approve a new structure of the Indigenous Church within the United Church, and relationship to the settler church, as will be determined by the Indigenous Church in its own time and through its own processes, within the framework of the Calls to the Church, and without the need for further remit approval; and**
- b) approve shortening the time for study and information sharing for regional councils and pastoral charges from 24 months to 12 months for this remit.**

**5. For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

This proposal is meant to build on NIC 01 National Indigenous Council (General Council 43, Annual Meeting - October 19, 2019) and the work of the National Indigenous Council, National Indigenous Elders Council, The National Spiritual Gathering and the Denominational Council to work together in determining a respectful relationship between the two parts of the church.