

GCE03 A PRINCIPLE BASED APPROACH TO JUSTICE WORK IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

Origin: Executive of the General Council

1. What is the issue?

Engaging the work of justice is part of the DNA of The United Church of Canada since its founding in 1925. The church understands its ministry to partner with God and others in the transformation of the world. To create spaces where all of creation can enjoy the fullness of life. This was rearticulated in many statements of the church including: *Mending the World*, (1997); *Seek Justice & Resist Evil: Towards a Global Economy for All God's People* (2000); *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire* (2006); and *Towards 2025: Justice Seeking Justice Living Church* (2012).

The church has used a policy-based approach to its justice and advocacy ministry, and this has largely served us well over the years. For the most part the policies are reflective of a particular time in history and limited by the current realities of the time. Changes to policies are often slow because of our governance processes. With dynamic and evolving contexts, policy statements made in specific moments in time find us out of sync with the calls of partners and with rapidly changing global realities. Increasingly, because of changing global and political contexts and requests from partners and other civil society partners, the United Church finds itself unable to be responsive because of the limitations of its policies. We believe it is time for the church to consider using a principal-based approach to its work: that the church identifies a set of principles that would govern its ability to respond to historic, current and emerging social justice issues.

2. Why is this issue important?

The 43rd General Council reaffirmed the denominational commitment to social justice as a core aspect of its identity. Furthermore, it also recommended that: "... a dedication to speaking out, when others are mostly silent, with people who are on the margins in our society" be a criterion on issues of decision-making based on research with people in the pews and people in the decision-making structures of the church.

As a member of The World Council of Churches, the United Church has affirmed the WCC's 2013 Statement on Mission and Evangelism: *Together Toward Life*: "Jesus Christ relates to and embraces those who are most marginalized in society, in order to confront and transform all that denies life. This includes cultures and systems which generate and sustain massive poverty, discrimination, and dehumanization, and which exploit or destroy people and the earth".

In 1988 the United Church affirmed in its Global Partnership Statement that partnership is "becoming involved with others in God's mission for wholeness of life, especially with those who suffer the effects of systems of injustice..."

A principle-based approach would strengthen our commitment and ability to be responsive to the commitments we have made and calls from people who are at the margins.

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. There are places where the church is already living into a principle-based approach to its justice and advocacy work such as:

- 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;
- welcoming [people of all sexual orientations and gender identities](#) into full membership and ministry in the church;
- committing to becoming [an intercultural church](#);
- committing to becoming an open, accessible, and barrier-free church, where there is [full participation of people with disabilities](#);
- working towards functional bilingualism and [ensuring that Francophone ministries are an integral part of the church's identity, mission, and vision](#);
- [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 church's commitment to relationships of mutuality, accompaniment, solidarity and partnership will be strengthened by action. Partners continue to call us to a more robust costly solidarity.

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

The Executive of the General Council proposes that the 44th General Council could:

Request that the Theology Interchurch Interfaith Committee develop a framework for a principle-based approach to all the justice work of The United Church of Canada and report back to the 45th General Council for adoption.

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

The proposal furthers the commitment to Costly Solidarity expressed in the 2018 proposal *PMM20 Towards Peace in Palestine and Israel: A Call to Costly Solidarity* and the 2021 proposal *GS129 Just Peace in Palestine and Israel*.