

**THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
TORONTO CONFERENCE**

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Executive of Toronto Conference
Wednesday, April 19, 2017**

The Executive of Toronto Conference met at the Toronto Conference office on Wednesday, April 19, 2017. The meeting began at 10:01 a.m. A quorum was present.

Members present

Audrey Brown (President), Bryan Ransom (Past President), David Allen (Executive Secretary), Sharon Aylsworth (Toronto Southeast), Ed Elliotson (Northern Waters), Anne Hepburn (Toronto Southeast), Eiko Hosaka (diversity), Roger Hutchinson (Toronto Southeast), Kristal McGee (Northern Waters), Angus MacLennan (Living Waters), Betty Lou McNabb (Living Waters), Lawrence Nyarko (diversity), Thérèse Samuel (Northern Waters), Marg Smith (Living Waters), Catherine Smith (South West) Hans van Nie (South West)

Regrets

Sungmin Jung (South West), Martha Wood (diversity)

Community building, listening to God

Constituting the Court and introductions

President Audrey Brown welcomed everyone and constituted the meeting in the name of Jesus Christ to conduct the business properly brought before it. She asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Worship/lighting the Christ candle/acknowledging the land

Thérèse Samuel of Northern Waters Presbytery led the opening worship. She lit the Christ candle and the four-directions candle. Kristal McGee read the story of the journey to Emmaus from Luke's Gospel. Prayer was offered and the group sang "In the Bulb There is a Flower".

Questions for evaluating the meeting

For this meeting, the Executive focused on two questions for evaluating its work: What voices have been heard? What voices have we not heard?

Adoption of agenda

MOTION by Angus MacLennan/Lawrence Nyarko that the agenda be adopted with the deletion of the audited financial statements which will be dealt with in a conference call.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Monitoring and Compliance with Policies**Executive Secretary's report**

The Executive Secretary's report (Appendix A) had a number of items where discussion was requested or up-dates given.

Shortening the 2018 annual meeting: The Executive is putting forth a motion at the annual meeting to extend the terms of office for the President and Past-President during the period of uncertainty as to whether the Conference will exist. The Executive Secretary proposed that the 2018 meeting be a two-day meeting if the three-council remit passes. The Executive AGREED with this recommendation and will pass a motion in June if the annual meeting votes in favour of the proposal.

Staffing: The Executive Secretary requested permission to spend Conference Fund money on career counselling and increased continuing education if the three-council remit passes.

MOTION by Bryan Ransom/Marg Smith that the Executive Secretary be authorized to implement career counselling and increased educational support for staff affected if the three-council remit passes.

MOTION

CARRIED.

These expenditures are undefined at the moment. The Executive Secretary gave some examples of what expenses might be included.

Grand River Spiritual and Educational Resources/AVEL: The February Executive meeting requested additional information about AVEL usage by communities of faith within Toronto Conference. The report (see p. 16/17-553) showed a very small number of users. The Executive Secretary proposed that the Executive take no action on paying for individual AVEL memberships.

Following discussion the Executive directed the Executive Secretary to check a couple of ideas with Grand River. One is a proposal that Toronto Conference would reimburse any AVEL memberships purchased by Toronto Conference communities of faith. The other is the idea of having a membership for the Conference office, but others could use that membership to order resources.

The Executive will return to this topic in June and will decide what action, if any, to take, and will decide whether there will be direct communication to all communities of faith that we have ceased providing a grant.

Members had an opportunity to ask questions about the entire report. Questions were asked about the visit from representatives of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, plus appreciation for John Neff being named as an additional Acting Executive Secretary.

Business matters to be considered by the Executive

Minutes

MOTION by Bryan Ransom/Marg Smith that the Executive approve the minutes of the March 27, 2017 Executive meeting and receive for information the sub-Executive minutes from its meeting of March 28, 2017.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Affirming Ministry material

The Executive reviewed the feedback on the Affirming Ministry vision statement and plan of action and engaged in extensive discussion and changes to the documents that had been circulated. The discussion began before lunch, and concluded following lunch.

MOTION by Betty Lou McNabb/Sharon Aylsworth that the Executive forward the following Affirming Ministry vision statement and plan of action to the Conference's annual meeting with a request for approval:

Vision statement

Striving to be faithful followers of Jesus in our time and place, Toronto Conference will continue to remove barriers to participation in the life and work of the Conference and society, committing itself to be open to the Spirit. Resisting all forms of oppression, we welcome and celebrate people of any sexual orientation and gender identity, and those who are marginalized.

Plan of action

The Executive and Executive Secretary will report annually on actions taken to fulfill the vision statement: "Striving to be faithful followers of Jesus in our time and place, Toronto Conference will continue to remove barriers to participation in the life and work of the Conference and society, committing itself to be open to the Spirit. Resisting all forms of oppression, we welcome and celebrate people of any sexual orientation

and gender identity, and those who are marginalized.” The reports will focus on...

Removing barriers to participation in the life and work of the Conference

Toronto Conference will...

- Review all policies and actions with a view to removing barriers
- Commit itself to relationship building in its business and activities
- Engage in education continually

Removing barriers to participation in society

Toronto Conference will...

- Advocate for municipal, provincial and federal government policies and laws that reflect a diverse and inclusive society
- Speak out on current events that demean, stigmatize or incite violence against others
- Encourage conversation with interchurch or interfaith groups

Being open to the Spirit

Toronto Conference will...

- Listen together for God’s on-going revelation
- Discern new voices and seek them out
- Strive to hear and engage the diverse voices within the Conference

Welcoming and celebrating people of any sexual orientation and gender identity

Toronto Conference will...

- Encourage communities of faith to engage in conversations about being safe spaces for people of any sexual orientation and gender identity within the church and community
 - Provide education on evolving gender identity language

Celebrating and acknowledging diversity

Toronto Conference will...

- Conduct its business and activities in a respectful manner that allows for open discussion and shared opinions

There were a number of suggestions for material to be included in the background to the proposal: be clear that this action doesn't presume that others will take a similar action; talk about how the conciliar system works with each body having the right to make its own decisions; if approved, the documents would outline what Toronto Conference itself is going to do, not what we're telling others to do; it's important to make a public statement that we're a safe place; include the process that was used.

Examples: A number of specific items were removed from the plan of action as they were examples of how the plan would be implemented. These items could be identified at the annual meeting so people would see potential ways in which the plan would be implemented. Those included:

- Maintain its properties, striving to ensure accessibility for all people
- Hold Conference events and meetings in locations that are accessible
 - Prepare and publicize an inventory of accessible locations within Toronto Conference communities of faith
- Engage guest speakers/preachers at events to reflect diversity
- Follow the practice of having introductions/name tags that indicate gender pronoun preferences.
- Review all policies with an affirming lens
- Monitor diversity in its nominations procedures
- Identify, challenge and/or eliminate barriers in hiring or ministry development processes
- Develop consistency in signage acknowledging the Conference as being an Affirming Ministry

Lunch

Ed Elliotson of Northern Waters Presbytery offered grace at 12:05 p.m.; the meeting resumed at 12:47 p.m.

Hans van Nie and Roger Hutchinson left the meeting.

Affirming Ministry proposal (cont'd)

The Executive did some final editing on the proposal, and the motion was put to a vote.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Program work at the Conference level

The February Executive meeting requested a rationale for why Conference would be involved with program work, given the decision in 2009 that it would not do so. The Executive Secretary had prepared a discussion paper and recommendations (see p. 16/17-551). Following discussion, two actions were taken.

MOTION by Marg Smith/Betty Lou McNabb that the Executive acknowledge that from time to time it will decide intentionally to do program work in specific areas.

MOTION

CARRIED.

The Executive directed the Executive Secretary to develop a policy for Conference Fund use that could cover educational purposes. This will be on the June Executive meeting agenda.

Proposal regarding terms of office

The Executive reviewed the wording of the proposal to the annual meeting.

MOTION by Anne Hepburn/Lawrence Nyarko that the Executive forward to the Conference's annual meeting a proposal (Appendix B) regarding the terms of office for the current President and Past-President.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Correspondence

There was no correspondence for this meeting to consider.

Omnibus motion

MOTION by Anne Hepburn/Bryan Ransom that the Toronto Conference Executive take the following actions:

a) Suitability for Ministry of Applicant for Admission

...on the advice of its Conference Interview Committee, which has reviewed the application and references from the applicant and has met and interviewed the applicant for admission, hereby recognize the Rev. Thomas Shin as suitable to proceed in the admission process to the order of ministry of The United Church of Canada as an ordained minister.

b) Grace Place Community Resource Centre

....approve Grace Place Community Resource Centre 2015-2016 Board of Directors

Graham Avery
Daniel Clark
Neil Davis
Christopher Moon
Stephen Rhodes
Bernhard Volkmann
Cameron Welsh

....approve Grace Place Community Resource Centre 2016-2017 Board of Directors

Graham Avery
Daniel Clark
Neil Davis
Christopher Moon
Stephen Rhodes
Bernhard Volkmann
Cameron Welsh

c) Simcoe Presbytery Camp (Camp Simpresca)

....approve the Simcoe Presbytery Camp (Camp Simpresca) 2016-2017 Board of Directors

Richard Austin
Brian Cooper
Lucas Cooper
Paul Cooper
Keri Craftchick
Sarah Draper
Colin Elliott
Sarah Fairman
Taylor Poulin
Charollette Reynolds

d) Wilmar Heights United Church Non-Profit Homes Inc.

...approve Wilmar Heights United Church Non-Profit Homes Inc. 2016-2017 Board of Directors

David Almack

Marc Cengiz
Trevins Fonseka
Neil Harris
Bridie Lane
Bob Pomeroy
Dean Scoble
Patricia Shearer

MOTION

CARRIED.

Proposed 2018 budget and projections for 2019 and 2020

The Executive reviewed the proposed 2018 budget and projections for 2019 and 2020.

MOTION by Ed Elliotson/Marg Smith that the Executive recommend to the annual meeting the adoption of the proposed 2018 budget and receive for information the proposed budgets for 2019 and 2020 (Appendix C).

MOTION

CARRIED.

Digest of actions and Executive accountability report

The Executive reviewed the digest of actions for the 2016-2017 Conference year to date, and discussed items to be included in its accountability report to the annual meeting. The report will be written by the President and will include mention of the following items:

- Appointment of intentional interim ministers
- The Explorer project
- PROK
- Continued right relations support
- Actions regarding the review of Gretta Vosper
- Affirming ministry process
- New church development and leadership fund

The draft report will be reviewed during a conference call, date to be determined.

Nominations

Past-President Bryan Ransom presented a report on behalf of the Nominations Committee. The report needs to be up-dated. This will be part of the conference call.

General Council restructuring

The Executive Secretary gave a brief up-date on General Council restructuring.

Sudbury consultation on regions: The President, along with Angus MacLennan and Bryan Ransom reported on the meeting held in Sudbury in March to discuss regional boundaries, if regions come into existence. Each presbytery had named a person to attend along with the President and one of the Conference Personnel Minister. It was a good experience to learn more about the other Conferences that are located wholly or in part in the Province of Ontario. There was good discussion, some possibilities were tossed around. The conversation will be passed on to the boundaries commission if the remit is passed. The group may meet again.

Meeting of Presidents-Elect/Leading Elders-Elect: The President talked about the meeting she had attended in March. She noted that we in Toronto Conference have many resources, while others do not. She said there was a good feeling of support, and there's a lot of stress. Many current Presidents are accepting longer terms until the remit results are known. There are big physical changes coming to the General Council staff as all staff are moving into reconfigured offices on the second floor. She said the group hopes to continue having on-line conversations.

Right Relations

There was no written report for this meeting.

Discussion items named by Executive members

There were no discussion items named in advance by members of the Executive.

Evaluation

The Executive returned to the questions for evaluating the meeting. The following comments were made:

- Youth voice missing
- Good to hear from Betty Lou and Marg
- Heard the voice of a young child (the Executive Secretary's grandson Aiden)
- Affirming discussion had a lot of time to listen and wrestle with voices that need to be heard
- We don't hear from atheists, even though we say we want to hear from everyone
- Good to hear voices from a full complement of Northern Waters Presbytery representatives
- We noted the discrepancy between our Conference and other Conferences
- Thanks to Bryan and Audrey for continuing for another year in the midst of ambiguity
- The Executive was mindful and care-filled for the staff in the time of transition
- We were open to the Spirit by being open to doing *ad hoc* programming
- It was good to hear updates about remits and processes
- Appreciated voices of Sharon and Thérèse and the insights they brought from personal experience

- Heard from the general public about the affirming ministry documents

Closing

With the business completed, the President declared the meeting ended at 3:10 p.m. Ed Elliotson of Northern Waters Presbytery offered a blessing.

Audrey Brown
President

David W. Allen
Executive Secretary

