

**THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
TORONTO CONFERENCE**

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Executive of Toronto Conference
Wednesday, June 6, 2018**

The Executive of Toronto Conference met at St. Paul's United Church, Orillia on Wednesday, June 6, 2018. The meeting began at 10:11 a.m. A quorum was present.

Members present

Audrey Brown (President), Bryan Ransom (Past-President), Jody Maltby (Executive Secretary), Sharon Aylsworth (Toronto Southeast), Terry Davies (Living Waters), Ed Elliotson (Northern Waters), Anne Hepburn (Toronto Southeast), Eiko Hosaka (diversity), Kristal McGee (Northern Waters), Angus MacLennan (Living Waters), Henry MacLeod (South West), Betty Lou McNabb (Living Waters), Lawrence Nyarko (diversity)

Regrets

Gail Hamblin (South West), Thérèse Samuel (Northern Waters), Jessica Stevenson (diversity)

Absent

Roger Hutchinson (Toronto Southeast), - (South West)

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.

Worship/lighting the Christ candle/acknowledging the land

Angus MacLennan lit the Christ candle and Betty Lou McNabb invited us into worship. She acknowledged that we gather on the traditional land of Rama First Nations and gave thanks for their history and their presence. She lit the candle of diversity to remind us that all are welcome in the United Church and this meeting. Betty Lou shared a devotion from The Upper Room Disciplines, the book of daily devotions for 2018, which focused on 2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1.

Questions for evaluating the meeting

For this meeting, the Executive focused on the following questions:

What voices have been heard? What voices have we not heard? What have we done or not done that's going to make a better church? What will be our legacy?

Adoption of agenda

MOTION by Betty Lou McNabb/Sharon Aylsworth that the agenda be adopted with the addition of the Explorer Project.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Corresponding Members

There were no corresponding members for this meeting.

Business matters to be considered by the Executive

Minutes

MOTION by Terry Davies/Bryan Ransom that the Executive approve the minutes of the May 16, 2018 Executive meeting

MOTION

CARRIED.

Proposals referred from the Toronto Conference 94th Annual Meeting (Appendix A)

New Business#1- Proposal to General Council - Seeking Peace in the Middle East with Methods Applied in South Africa

MOTION by Jody Maltby/Bryan Ransom that Toronto Conference agrees with the proposal entitled "Seeking Peace in the Middle East with Methods Applied in South Africa"

and makes the following recommendations:

This proposal offers one way to move forward but we acknowledge that discussion of peace in the Middle East needs to occur within the context of all conversations that seek peace in the world.

We acknowledge the United Church's colonial application of the policy of assimilation and rejection of an Indigenous understanding of spirituality. We understand that any attempt by us to state a definitive solution to the conflict in the Middle East is a form of colonization.

We acknowledge that any action taken by the United Church with respect to the Middle East may be experienced and/or perceived as anti-Semitism. We seek justice for all peoples in Israel and Palestine.

Naming all of the above, ongoing escalation of development in the occupied zones is weakening future negotiations and needs to be stopped immediately. For this reason, we feel compelled to stand up for the well-being of the Palestinian people.

The National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine (NCCOP) wrote an open letter to the World Council of Churches and its members churches which calls for a more “costly solidarity” with regard to the suffering and hardship placed upon Palestinians who have lived under occupation since 1967.

The United Church has advanced in incremental steps its policies regarding Israel-Palestine over a number of General Councils, yet still the suffering continues unmitigated. The occupation of Palestinian lands/territories continues unabated, and people continue to suffer untold hardships due to their lack of human rights.

We believe that ongoing conversation about how we might contribute to peace in the Middle East needs to continue at the denominational level.

MOTION

CARRIED.

New Business #2 – Proposal to General Council - Responding with Costly Solidarity to Palestinian Partners

MOTION by Jody Maltby/Bryan Ransom that Toronto Conference agrees with the proposal entitled “Responding with Costly Solidarity to Palestinian Partners”

MOTION

DEFEATED.

MOTION by Jody Maltby/Bryan Ransom that Toronto Conference does not agree with the proposal entitled “Responding with Costly Solidarity to Palestinian Partners” but is passing it on to the General Council for further consideration.

MOTION

DEFEATED.

Proposal to General Council #7 - Protecting the Pension Plan with Participant Permission

The Executive Secretary shared advice that was provided from the General Secretary of the General Council and from legal and pension specialists to assist Conferences in addressing proposals regarding the Pension Plan.

According to this advice, the actions requested in PGC#7 are outside of the jurisdiction of the General Council to act on and therefore these proposals are ultra vires, or out of order.

The Executive of the General Council in most matters acts only on the direction or delegation of the General Council, except in emergent issues. In regards to the pension fund, however, the Executive acts as the legal Administrator of the plan as defined by the Pension Benefits Act. This is not a role delegated to it by the General Council. In this role

it is legally bound to ensure that the pension plan and pension fund are administered in accordance with the Pension Benefits Act and regulations and the terms of the pension plan. The administrator is accountable to all participants of the pension plan (e.g., plan beneficiaries, plan sponsors (employers) and regulatory authorities). Although the General Council Executive is accountable to the General Council on most matters, in relation to the pension plan, the General Council has no authority to direct or restrict how the Executive, acting as the administrator, exercises these duties.

Based on the information provided by the General Secretary, the President ruled Proposal to General Council #7 - Protecting the Pension Plan with Participant Permission out of order.

Proposal to General Council #8 - Supplementing Pension Benefits

The Executive Secretary shared advice provided by the General Secretary and legal and pension specialists to assist Conferences in addressing proposals regarding the Pension Plan.

Any proposal directing that at least 10% of the proceeds of the sale of property go to a fund to supplement pension benefits, is also outside of the jurisdiction of the General Council. The General Council could only impose this upon the properties it has authority over. The bulk of church property sales, and the decisions about the sale proceeds, are within the exclusive authority of other courts.

Based on the information provided by the General Secretary, the President ruled Proposal to General Council #8 – Supplementing Pension Benefits out of order.

MOTION by Bryan Ransom/Sharon Aylsworth, in response to PGC#7 and PGC#8 that the Executive expresses concern to the General Council Executive and the Pension Plan Board for United Church pension plan retirees who have not had an increase in pension benefits since 2009 and propose that affordable means to provide additional support or benefits to retirees be explored.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Proposal to General Council #9 - Inflation Affects Pensioners Too: Adding Cost of Living Allowance to Retirees' Pension as with Active Members' Salary

MOTION by Jody Maltby/Bryan Ransom that Toronto Conference agrees with the proposal entitled "Inflation Affects Pensioners Too – Adding Cost of Living Allowance to Retirees' Pension as with Active Members' Salary"

MOTION

DEFEATED.

MOTION by Jody Maltby/Bryan Ransom that Toronto Conference does not agree with the proposal entitled “Inflation Affects Pensioners Too – Adding Cost of Living Allowance to Retirees’ Pension as with Active Members’ Salary” but is passing it on to the General Council for further consideration.

With the following comments:

We acknowledge the financial implications of increases to pension benefits, based on estimates provided by Mercer, the actuarial consultants for the Pension Plan: “A catch up since the last ad hoc increase in 2009 would require an estimated \$193 million to fund. A 1% annual indexing going forward would require \$191 million to fund. The total estimated cost of these proposals is \$384 million. The go forward indexing, alone, not including the catch up, would require that member and employer contributions increase from the current total of 15% of pensionable earnings (6% members and 9% employers) to approximately 24.5%.”

We acknowledge that the General Council has no authority to direct or restrict how the General Council Executive, acting as the legal Administrator of the Pension Plan, exercises these duties.

At the same time, we acknowledge the justice issue that is raised in this proposal. We call on the General Council to join with us in expressing concern to the General Council Executive and the Pension Plan Board for United Church pension plan retirees who have not had an increase in pension benefits since 2009 and propose that affordable means to provide additional support or benefits to retirees be explored.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Sharing Our Resources – Another View – Sharon Aylsworth (Appendix B)

Sharon spoke to her written correspondence. The Executive engaged in helpful conversation about the difference between giving away funds and sharing resources, equity vs. equality, succession for Northern Waters Presbytery and the tension between those with resources and those without. We named our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, and ways we can safeguard priorities that can have a positive impact nationally. We live with hope that we can continue to find ways to be generous.

Lunch

The Executive broke for lunch at 12:05 p.m. Terry Davies offered grace.

The Executive reconvened at 1:07 p.m. and continued its conversation about sharing resources.

The Executive Secretary will prepare a list of priorities out of our policy handbook and minutes and circulate it to the Executive for feedback, after which it will be shared with the Regional Transition Commissions.

Region 8 and Region 10 Transition Commission

The Executive Secretary reported that the Indigenous Representative on the Region 8 Transition Commission will be Martha Pedoniquotte and on Region 10 Transition Commission will be Evan Smith.

MOTION by Anne Hepburn/Bryan Ransom that the following people be added to the Region 10 Transition Commission: Kye Munro (diversity), Marg Walker (TSE), Martha ter Kuile (TSE – visionary)

MOTION

CARRIED.

The President noted that Jessica Stevenson will be the additional delegate to the Financial Consultation June 15 – 17.

The President reported that she will not be able to attend GC43 and is able to send a designate. The President has asked Sharon Aylsworth to be her designate.

MOTION by Betty Lou McNabb/Angus MacLennan that Sharon Aylsworth be the President's designate at GC43 and Tracy Odell attend as a lay commissioner.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Restoration of Identity Legacy Project

Betty Lou spoke to the request for the Restoration of Identity Legacy Project (Appendix C) which responds to TRC Call to Action # 82

MOTION by Anne Hepburn/Bryan Ransom that the Executive of Toronto Conference approve a grant of \$100,000 to support the IRSS Legacy "Restoration of Identity" project, with money to come from the Conference Fund, and approve the circulation of the drafted fundraising letter to all congregations within Toronto Conference.

MOTION

CARRIED.

The President asked that it be noted in the letter to congregations that Toronto Conference has committed \$100,000 to the project. We will make this letter a priority to coincide with Aboriginal Sunday.

Explorer Project

The Executive Secretary reported that there is significant interest in the Explorer Project continuing but there is not clarity about where it should be housed in the new structure. There has been some conversation that it might become a national project while others feel strongly that it should remain a regional initiative.

MOTION by Lawrence Nyarko/Kristal McGee that the Executive set aside \$75,000 to cover the costs of the Explorer Project for 2019 to ensure that it transitions into the new structure, with the money to come from the Conference Fund and that any unspent money from 2018 be added to this amount.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Review of annual meeting and presbytery reports

The President noted the issue of visual accessibility because of the low ceiling at the annual meeting. This meant that the screens could not be high enough to allow folks to stand and sing as this meant that those behind couldn't see. She also noted learnings around ASL signers. The company we used last year were not willing to appear on the livestream and we were not able to find someone else to attend. Going forward, we need to find a solution to this issue so that there is signing available.

Toronto Conference has funded our youth participation at Conference for the last six years and we may want that to be included on our list of priorities to share with the regions.

The session on resiliency changed the meeting, having breathed together and shared stories, the meeting seemed less stressful. A similar thing happened when we had the Indigenous focus. A well-chosen theme and speaker can really set the tone for the meeting.

Some folks would have liked more tools to handle the stress of what is actually happening in the church.

The closing process of moving from table to table was fun, thoughtful and well-laid out and was a good opportunity for people to tell stories and celebrate. It was exactly what we were hoping for.

The music was great and people appreciated the band.

We made the decision to do as much as we could while honouring the time commitments to other activities. Even though we didn't finish the proposals, this was a good call.

Volunteers were wonderful and helpful.

The Presbytery reports (Appendix D) have been shared with Peter Hartmanns and Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa. There seem to be opportunities for overlap in the priorities

coming from the presbyteries, for example, how to support smaller congregations. It feels like people are thinking ahead without binding the regions.

Meetings for the Fall

We have two meetings scheduled in the fall: September 12, 2018 at South West Presbytery and November 14, 2018 at Toronto Southeast Presbytery. It was AGREED that the September 12th meeting be called only if necessary, and that the November 14th meeting will be the final meeting and will occur in-person.

Betty Lou noted that Saturday September 22 and Sunday September 23, Georgina Island has their pow wow at Sibbald Point Provincial Park.

Evaluation

The Executive turned to the questions for evaluating the meeting. For this meeting, the Executive focused on what voices have been heard? What voices have we not heard? What have we done or not done that's going to make a better church? What will be our legacy?

The following comments were made:

- Thanks to Sharon for her letter that helped with some clarity for all of us; a very thoughtful effort and good discussion
- The letter for the funding for the Right Relations project brings the Indigenous voices to the table.
- Felt like General Council Executive were treated with respect regarding the proposals and yet we didn't drop either perspective, the retirees were treated with respect as well.
- Discussion of Israel and Palestine showed greater capacity for complexity and ability to bring wisdom and awareness and was less polarizing than it has been at times
- Sorry to hear that Eiko may not be with us again and we will miss her voice.
- Missed the voice of the younger generation which might have brought a different perspective to some of our conversations
- Appreciated the experience of the TRC Call #82 art exhibit housed at St. Paul's that resonated with right relations work.
- A lot of art ends up in landfill because people can't find a place to put it; there is huge opportunity for churches to display important pieces.
- Appreciate the leadership team of Audrey and Jody, and their competency so that we can feel confident about the things we discuss that we have the background we need.
- Appreciated how we began with the language in worship that was fresh and helped us to get centred and grounded and was heartened to know that someone in the States is reading and responding to our United Church creed – we are part of something bigger.

Closing

With the business completed, the President declared the meeting ended at 2:35 p.m.
Angus MacLennan offered a blessing.

Audrey Brown
President

Jody Maltby
Executive Secretary

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