

CS02 ESSENTIAL AGREEMENT

Origin: Little Current Pastoral Charge, Canadian Shield Regional Council

1. What is the Issue?

We believe our Holy Reconciler is calling us to address the body of Jesus, the Church, as it is formed as the United Church of Canada, to reaffirm what it means for us to be in essential unity in Christ. The United Church of Canada continues to review, refine and update as appropriate its governance policy and procedures as the Spirit moves us. While one cannot anticipate every eventuality, we can and must pause to reflect: do these revisions and updates adequately reflect our covenants with God and each other?

The specific event that sparked this proposal is the November, 2018 confidential settlement between a former Conference of the United Church of Canada, a specific United Church Community of Faith and an ordained Minister who is allowed to continue in her Ministerial role despite the fact that this Clergy person has renounced the vows taken at the time of her ordination.

It is not our intent to “relitigate” this settlement but, in the spirit of “continuous improvement,” to seek avenues to bolster the policies and procedures of the United Church of Canada. As Churchill said, “Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.” To be united, and to seek to be uniting, we must have a way to stay united and in essential agreement; and also have a path forward for those who are not in essential agreement.

2. Why is this Issue Important?

The Little Current Pastoral Charge in its letter of January 28, 2019 to the Moderator, Richard Bott, raised the question of “unintended consequences” that may arise from this confidential settlement. Could a local pragmatic settlement have country wide precedent setting repercussions?

The February 6, 2019 correspondence from the national Church in response to our Little Current Pastoral Charge January, 2019 letter noted that “there are many who are dismayed at the recent settlement”. However, the settlement does not “set a precedent that binds any future complaints.” Are we certain of this? At the current time an individual Community of Faith or Regional Council could renounce their covenant and vows with the others of our denomination and yet remained part of the United Church.

In our June 1, 2019 submission to the Canadian Shield Regional Council, we said that it is the expectation of the members and adherents of the United Church of Canada that while we are “pilgrims each with our own cultural values, assumptions and world views,” that nationwide there will be, in general terms, a consistency of worship and core beliefs as overseen by the Regional Councils for Communities of Faith and the Office of Vocations for Ministry personnel.

This concern and proposal were discussed initially by the Little Current Pastoral Charge Council in December, 2018 and January, 2019 and approved at the Pastoral Charge Annual Meeting in February, 2019. The letter to the Moderator, Richard Bott was reviewed with the North Shore Cluster of the United Church (Manitoulin Island Communities of Faith and the north shore of Lake Huron Communities of Faith) on January 31, 2019. The proposal was submitted and approved at the Canadian Shield Regional Council meeting in Sault Ste Marie, Ontario on June 1, 2019.

We believe this is important to our shared mission to be one in Christ. Without clear guidelines and procedures, we do not have a way to seek reconciliation with those individuals or communities who are no longer in essential agreement. We also do not have a way to peacefully part ways should the parties find essential agreement to be not possible at that time. This model of seeking unity, and parting in peace if not possible, is given to us by Jesus in Matt. 18:15-17.

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

A clearer policy on both how to stay in essential agreement, and how to peacefully part ways when it is not possible, will help the Church live out its commitment to being an intercultural church. Conflicts naturally arise among all of the people of God. The more diverse we become, the more likely we will have conflicts borne of different cultures, backgrounds, theologies, symbolism, and experiences. Conflict in and of itself is not bad. Jesus readily entered debate with others and accepted the correction of the woman in Matt. 15:27. How to manage conflict is a gift of the Spirit.

As God is calling to all peoples to be hospitable, and to welcome the stranger as family, while yet remaining authentically who God made us to be – we *will* have more conflicts and disagreements in the future. We *will* have more family who seem to be strangers; and strangers who are family. The Family of God, known as the Church of God, must seek ways to “if possible, as much as it depends on [us], live at peace with everyone.” (Rom. 12:18). Planning ways through conflict, misunderstandings, and reconciliation or mutually parting with blessings, is a way to plan for peace with all cultures and peoples.

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

This proposal is submitted to the General Council in an effort to clarify and enhance governance policies and procedures for the United Church of Canada so that the national Church has a clear and consistent approach and policy coast to coast to coast in order to deal with any future comparable situations.

Our proposal is that the United Church of Canada undertake steps to 1) Identify, 2) Investigate and 3) Implement measures in the United Church Manual (2019) including but not necessarily limited to:

- J.1.: Regional Council Oversight of Communities of Faith
- J.2.: Office of Vocation Oversight of Ministry Personnel

- J.4. Accountability
- J.6.: Office of Vocation Action – Ministry Personnel

So that the appropriate action is taken when Ministry Personnel, or Communities of Faith, renounce their ordination vows and/or covenants. Such a review will strive to ensure nationwide consistency of approach to Ministry personnel matters among Communities of Faith and Regional Councils. We do not seek to bring discord from the past, but rather to plan for the future so that when we come together with our different hymns, instructions, revelations, tongues and interpretations, we come together in a manner that builds the Church and each of us up (1 Cor. 14:26).

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

2019 Canadian Shield Regional Council Meeting (June 2019 in Sault Ste. Marie, ON) - Proposal
Proposal #2019-01: *Resolution, Little Current Pastoral Charge*

MOTION by Barbara Nott/Bill Jones

RC Mtg 2019-06-01-06

That the Canadian Shield Regional Council forward proposal #2019-01, *Resolution, Little Current Pastoral Charge* to the General Council with concurrence.

CARRIED

There were abstentions to the vote.