

CW01 REQUIRING ONGOING ESSENTIAL AGREEMENT FOR MINISTRY PERSONNEL

Origin: Chinook Winds Region / Region 3

1. What is the issue?

Our Church's requirement that ministry candidates be in "Essential Agreement" with our Statement of Doctrine, and to accept it as being in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, does not currently hold already-ordained/commissioned/recognized ministry personnel accountable to the same standard.

We believe that God is inviting us to consider clarifying this in our theology and practice. It is our belief that, in order to continue to be suitable for ministry in The United Church of Canada, ongoing essential agreement (as it has been defined by the Theology and Inter-Church, Inter-Faith Committee) should be required of all ministry personnel throughout their service to the Church.

2. Why is this issue important?

The theological diversity of The United Church of Canada has long been rooted in the concept of "Essential Agreement." This term is used in the Polity section of *The Manual* (2021), III.13.2—as well as in several subsequent sections—in reference to requirements for readiness for commissioning, ordination, or recognition of ministry candidates (H.4.7), readiness and suitability of clergy from other denominations for admission to the order of ministry (H.6.1), and under the requirements for readmission of those who have previously been placed on the Discontinued Service List(s) (H.8.2).

As was expounded in a recent statement by the Theology Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee, "Essential agreement means that the examining committee must be able to find that the candidate they are interviewing stands sufficiently within the Christian tradition, as expressed in the United Church's Statement of Doctrine." [1]

However, we do not currently have any policy or mechanism for requiring or checking essential agreement from those already serving in ministry. This is concerning. It creates the potential for a scenario in which a ministry candidate may be found to be in essential agreement at a single point in time (prior to their ordination/commissioning/recognition), but whose theological perspective(s) may evolve over a period of years/decades to the point where they are no longer in essential agreement, yet still authorized to preach and teach as ordered ministers. In recent times, this has resulted not only in divisive debates at every level of the church, but also in legal action being taken over disagreements about the interpretation of our polity. This threatens the unity and mission of the Church, and it harms our public witness.

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

We request that the 44th General Council consider:

- Authorizing an amendment to *The Manual* to include language around essential agreement as an ongoing requirement of all ministry personnel; and/or
- Directing the Office of Vocation to develop a policy/procedure/covenant/etc. in regard to requiring ongoing essential agreement as a permanent criterion of suitability for ministry; and/or
- Directing the Office of Vocation to develop a process by which the ongoing theological expectations of ministry personnel are made clear, and they are formally held accountable to those expectations; and/or
- Adding an affirmation/check-in regarding essential agreement to the mandatory declarations/trainings that ministry personnel are required to affirm on ongoing basis; and/or
- Creating a third “tier” of the Discontinued Service List that would provide grace and accompaniment for ministry personnel who are found to be no longer in essential agreement. Currently, there are only two DSLs: Disciplinary and Voluntary. A third tier could serve as an intermediary DSL for ministry personnel who are sincerely no longer in essential agreement but whom the Church does not want to lose their pension and benefits; and/or
- Taking some other action that would clarify the expectations of the Church in regards to established ministry personnel and essential agreement.

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

If you have questions regarding this proposal please send them to David Pollard revdave572@gmail.com