

## AMC 2 - IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CALLS TO CHURCH

### Origin: Aboriginal Ministries Council

#### 1. What is the issue?

The implementation of the Calls to the Church of the Indigenous Circle provides a strategy by which the church can achieve, “in sincerity and action”, God’s call to good and right relations.

The United Church of Canada has been on a journey that is seeking to reconcile its relationship with Canada’s Indigenous Peoples for more than 30 years. In 1986, the Church responded to a call from Indigenous Peoples to apologize for its role in colonization and the destruction of their cultures and spiritual practices. The Apology was acknowledged by the Indigenous church two years later in the hope that the Church would live out the Apology in “action and sincerity.”

On March 31, 2016, the United Church released a “*Statement on UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*” (UN Declaration) which acknowledged that the church’s practices “for many years resulted in the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from visioning, leadership and decision-making.” (*The Manual*, 2013, p. 4).

*In that same statement the church recognized “that this work will be neither quick nor easy. The settler church is only beginning to absorb the shock of its complicity in creating the inequities facing Indigenous Peoples. The Indigenous church is also facing the challenge of decolonization. The 1986 Apology shifted us as a denomination; it impacted our identity in ways that we couldn’t understand at the time. Adopting the UN Declaration as the framework for reconciliation brings us to a similar moment now. Yet we know, not just in our hearts and minds, but where our faith resides, that this is the path we are meant to be on together. “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself...and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” (2 Corinthians 5:18–19)*

*We are not sure what lies ahead as we complete this turn towards justice and deepen our commitment to a new identity, a new relationship, and a new way of being, both in the church and in the world.*

*A new relationship is waiting, and we turn our faces towards it.”*

*The Caretakers of our Indigenous Circle*, a group of Indigenous leaders from across The United Church of Canada, gathered throughout 2016 and 2017 to discern concrete actions for the Indigenous church. This resulted in the development of the ***Calls to the Church*** document. ([Link to report.](#)) The Caretakers also gave oversight to a process of consultation with Indigenous Communities of Faith during that same period. The final document was reviewed by caucus groups at the July 2017 National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering in Pinawa, Manitoba. On the last day of this three-day gathering, the document was affirmed through a process of consensus.

The Indigenous church recognizes that the church's long history with Indigenous Peoples also includes spaces of "bright beginnings." Indigenous Peoples of the United Church, through the framework of the UN Declaration and the ***Calls to the Church***, are hopeful that another Kairos moment is upon the church.

The ***Calls to the Church*** include:

1. The establishment of an Indigenous office or department within the Office of Vocation so that ministry personnel in Indigenous communities have services provided by people who are knowledgeable of Indigenous ways of being and working; and, that this office or department have an advisory group that is engaged in the development of Indigenous ministry policy;
2. Indigenous ministry formation, accompaniment and oversight processes;
3. Indigenous Communities of Faith approved ministry;
4. The development of an Indigenous Testamur;
5. The creation of National Indigenous Organization for Support and Fellowship;
6. Belonging: the right for Indigenous church communities to choose their relationships within a three court structure;
7. Indigenous community leadership and consensus building;
8. Sustainable support;
9. Affirm sexual orientation and diversity – to be promoted through education and by accompanying Indigenous communities to support LGBTQ2A+ members and youth.

## 2. Why is this issue important?

The ***Calls to the Church*** document outlines pathways for the whole church to continue to walk in the Spirit of Christ toward justice, healing, and reconciliation. It provides clear strategies and principles for the ongoing development of The United Church of Canada's Indigenous church's vision of mission and ministry. The document communicates how *"Our 'roots' as Indigenous peoples are what the Creator has made us to be. We are embracing who we are as Creator made us. The Indigenous church will be an instrument of healing our identity and a place of renewal of our cultures. Our roots have been broken by colonialism and we will restore them."*

The ***Calls to the Church*** uphold the norms, principles, and standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which our church publically committed to adopting and complying with as a framework for reconciliation on March 31, 2016.

We have understood these principles, norms, and standards to be reflected in:

- The right to self-determination
- The right to cultural and spiritual identity
- The right to participate in decision-making
- The right to lands and resources
- The right to free, prior, and informed consent
- The right to be free from discrimination

### 3. How might the General Council Respond to this Issue?

Receive with approval the *Calls to the Church*, and

- a) Endorse and commit the United Church of Canada to the *Calls to the Church*, named in the report of the Caretakers of Our Indigenous Circle, and authorize and direct the following steps towards fulfilling these Calls:
  - a. Approve the creation of a National Indigenous Elders Council (Elders Council) to provide spiritual advice to the Denominational Council; Denominational Executive; Indigenous Organization; National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering; Regional Councils; Office of Vocation; and Working Groups of the Church, as capacity allows:
    - i. The Moderator may call upon this Council from time to time for advice and guidance.
    - ii. The National Indigenous Elders Council will consist of eight (8) members that will reflect an equitable representation from across Canada and will include the urban Indigenous and LGBTQ2 Spirit Communities;
    - iii. Indigenous Communities of Faith will lift up Elders they know to be suitable for this work, including Elders who follow traditional Indigenous spiritual paths as well as Elders who identify themselves as Christian.
    - iv. The Elders Council will meet face-to-face during its formation to develop protocols, build relationships, and deepen their knowledge of the mission and ministry of the church and the vision for the Indigenous Church. There will be one face-to-face meeting per year, thereafter.
  - b. Approve the creation of a National Indigenous Organization, which will be a decision making body which will:
    - i. Receive spiritual direction on matters of ministry and mission from the National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering and the National Indigenous Elders Council;
    - ii. Provide presence and voice to the Denominational Council, its Executive, Regional Councils, and the Office of Vocation;
    - iii. Have responsibility for decision-making on matters of Indigenous Real Property; Stewardship, including Mission Support Granting to all Indigenous Communities of Faith; Healing Fund; Youth and Congregational Support and development; Provide oversight of Leadership/Congregational Development Funds;
    - iv. Glean best practices from the rich history of the All Native Circle Conference, Ontario-Quebec Native Ministries, and British Columbia Native Ministries;
    - v. Consist of representatives from the National Elders Council, youth, strategic thinkers, knowledge keepers, and carriers of history; urban Indigenous and LGBTQ2 Spirit communities, for a total of 8-10 members;
    - vi. Meet face-to-face once each year;
    - vii. Provide guidance to the Indigenous Justice Working Group;
    - viii. Promote and honour local protocols (as determined by the local

- Communities of Faith) and will honour Elders;**
- ix. **Develop and implement strong communications strategies and resources necessary to accomplish the work of a National Indigenous Organization;**
  - x. **Provide continued opportunities for the gathering, working together, and supportive work of all the Indigenous faith communities in the United Church. The following gatherings will honour the cultural and linguistic regions of the Indigenous communities and support a national network of urban Indigenous ministries:**
    - 1. **A National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering to be held every three (3) years, with the first National Indigenous Spiritual Gathering to be held in August 2019 at the Geneva Park Convention Centre, the traditional territories of the Williams Treaties (Orillia, ON) to mark the inauguration of the new National Indigenous Organization;**
    - 2. **Cluster gatherings to provide continued opportunities for local networking, discussion, common issues of concern, fellowship, and collaboration;**
    - 3. **A national network of urban Indigenous ministries.**
  - xi. **Work in collaboration with other parts of the church to strengthen relationships between the Indigenous communities of faith and the wider Church through Indigenous representation in the areas of education of all United Church personnel, including Indigenous history, culture, and contemporary issues; groups who look to strengthen relations with Indigenous Communities of Faith; and reignite the spiritual, cultural, holistic, and healing renewal of the whole church.**
  - c. **Authorize the Indigenous members of the current Aboriginal Ministries Council to serve as the National Indigenous Council until such time as the new organization is established, which shall be no later than August 2019.**
  - d. **Authorize and direct the General Secretary, working with the National Indigenous Council, the Executive of the Denominational Council, and the Executive Minister of Indigenous Ministries, to support and facilitate such further steps as may be needed to implement the *Calls to the Church*.**

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

The Comprehensive Review Task Group reported to the 42nd General Council in 2015 that they had engaged in consultations with the Aboriginal Ministries Council and its members, and realized that the conversations needed more time. The 42nd General Council directed that the Executive establish a process to continue these conversations.

At the November 2015 General Council Executive (GCE) meeting, the Aboriginal Ministries Council proposed a framework for conversations to take place among the Indigenous groups that make up the Aboriginal Ministries Council. General Council Executive representatives were invited to participate as listeners. Subsequently, GCE representatives occasionally met with Indigenous leaders for joint conversation and collaboration. The General Council Executive accepted this process and the resulting work of the Caretakers of Our Indigenous Circle, the

document entitled *Calls to the Church*, has been shared with the General Council Executive in an earlier form, discussed at the 2017 National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering, and worked on further by the Caretakers to reflect the input of the National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering.

The Executive of the General Council received the ***Calls to the Church*** document. Consensus was reached to proceed with Phase II of the consultation process: *Calls to the Church/Remit Implementation Project*.

The November 2017 Executive of General Council received the ***Calls to the Church*** document (AMC2) and recommended it for approval at the 43rd General Council of The United Church of Canada.

The Indigenous Church has taken time to remember with gratitude:

- The 1980's national Aboriginal ministry consultations that eventually became the current National Aboriginal Spiritual Gathering;
- Keewatin Presbytery as the first Indigenous presbytery in The United Church of Canada in 1982;
- The establishment in 1982 of the National Native Ministries Council in The United Church of Canada to oversee the work of the first National Native Ministries Coordinator, Rev. Stan McKay Jr;
- The local work that led to the formation of All Tribes, Plains, and Great Lakes presbyteries that were the basis of All Native Circle Conference;
- The historic establishment of All Native Circle Conference, the first Indigenous conference and one that crossed colonial boundaries in 1988;
- The establishment of British Columbia Native Ministries in 1988;
- The establishment of Ontario and Quebec Native Ministries in 1989;
- The establishment of the Aboriginal Ministries Council and its staff, the Aboriginal Ministries Circle, at General Council Office and beyond in 2008;
- The Ecumenical gatherings over the decades;
- That urban Indigenous ministry often differs from that in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities;
- That according to the 2006 Census, more than half of people identifying themselves in some way as Indigenous reside in urban areas; and
- That the time has come to foster and support the creation of more urban Indigenous ministries.

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to [info@generalcouncil43.ca](mailto:info@generalcouncil43.ca).