

An Invitation toward Decolonizing the Structure of The United Church of Canada

Remit 1: Establishing an Autonomous National Indigenous Organization

Here are some of the questions, raised in ARWRC, HFRC and WOWRC, and our responses. There are so many questions, and no quick answers. Whether you read all of this, or look to the question that is most pressing for you at this time, we hope it is helpful in your remit deliberations.

John Egger and Thérèse Samuel

with input from Cathy Hird, Kathy Douglas, Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa and Tim Hackborn

A colonial way to look at the remit question is:

This remit is really just about changing The Manual, and changing our structures.

A decolonizing way to look at it is:

The remit is about changing the way we relate with one another, and through reconciliation we can strengthen our relationships.

Why can we not know all the details of the new structure before the remit is voted on?

As non-Indigenous people writing this, it seems to John and Thérèse that Indigenous leaders within the church, in seeking an autonomous structure within The United Church of Canada, are inviting the rest of the church into a deeper, more meaningful relationship as the church. Some of the historic ways that we have been church have put up blocks that limit Indigenous people's authentic engagement in the church. This remit is a beginning to remove those blocks. Relationship can only be healthy if each of the parties in the relationship is honoured and respected and able to be authentically who they are. This remit would be one step toward journeying together in reconciliation as equals, as those in a committed relationship.

The remit is about letting go of colonial structure. Instead of wanting to know where we are going before we set out, in relationship we can discover it together on the way. The remit is about people who hold power releasing control, so that power can be shared more equitably. That can be an uncomfortable thing for a church that has been structured around some people having power over others, but it is a necessary part of the journey.

Tim Hackborn reminds us that, as stated in the [Caretakers' Calls to the Church](#) (page 3), "We have faith that the Spirit of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the evidence of creation, and the love of God will move us forward on the road of true reconciliation so that we can know 'the beloved community' of 'All Our Relations.'"

How would an autonomous Indigenous Organization impact doctrine and spiritual expression?

The United Church of Canada has agreed upon statements of faith and each congregation is free to determine their way of living out that faith. This is true for Indigenous and non-Indigenous congregations. Our statements of faith come out of dialogue and prayerful discernment of the church. This prayerful discernment will surely continue, and the hope is that if this remit passes, it will allow for Indigenous voices to be more authentically present in our ongoing discernment as a church.

How will this remit impact 2S-LGBTQIA+ Inclusion?*

In The United Church of Canada, it is up to each congregation to determine where they stand on the inclusion of 2S-LGBTQIA+ people. That will not change with this remit. Please note that the [Caretakers' Calls to the Church](#) (page 11) speaks to the inclusion of people of all gender and sexual identities with an Indigenous United Church perspective.

* 2S-LGBTQIA+ stands for Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other sexual and gender minorities.

If the remit doesn't pass, what recourse is available for the Indigenous Church to establish a structure that suits their needs?

The United Church of Canada is committed to moving toward right relations. Whether the remit passes or fails that work will continue. On that pathway there will be many conversations that need to happen, some of which might be quite uncomfortable. This will be true whether the remit passes or fails. If it does not pass, a future General Council could issue a new remit if that is something the Indigenous Church wishes, but it is not known what the future response might be.

If the remit passes, will it mean the end of the non-Indigenous Church's relationships with Indigenous Churches.

No. On the contrary, it will mark the beginning of a new era of relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in The United Church of Canada. The shape that relationship will take is not yet known, and will unfold as we move forward in relationship. It should be noted that the Indigenous Church is representative of many different nations, and this is an opportunity to honour the complexity and diversity of those relationships.

If the remit passes, will the National Indigenous Organization be its own church?

We sometimes have heard people talk about the proposed National Indigenous Organization and The United Church of Canada, as if these would be separate. They would not. There has always been an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous church in The United Church of Canada. What this remit does is makes changes to the governance structure of the Indigenous church.

This might be a difficult conversation. What if this raises disagreements within our church?

It is important to acknowledge that the deepening of any relationship will always include disagreements and unexpected perspectives. Even so, engaging in an uncomfortable conversation is worth it, and it's better than not having had the conversation. Ultimately, whether the remit passes or is defeated, we as a church will continue to be called to engage in uncomfortable conversations as we seek to be a faithful church of Jesus Christ in our time and place. This is part of living into our commitment toward right relations.

In deciding whether to vote yes or no:

Consider these questions:

- Will this remit move the church in a meaningful way toward decolonization?
- Will it create conditions for more just relationships?
- Will it move the church closer to our call as disciples of Jesus Christ, and as the church of Jesus Christ in this time and place?
- Is this what you believe the Spirit is calling the church to do at this time?

Study, share, discuss, ask, listen, and pray.

Know that whatever you decide, there will be many more conversations ahead.

And trust that wherever the future takes us, God will continue to be with us.

Thérèse Samuel *she/her*, Minister, Right Relations and Social Justice TSamuel@united-church.ca

John Egger, *he/him*, Minister, Social Justice; JEgger@united-church.ca

Antler River Watershed, Western Ontario Waterways, Horseshoe Falls Regional Councils