

# Fishing on the Other Side: Seeking the Wisdom of Presbyteries, Districts, the *Consistoire*, and the Synod

February 6, 2014

## A. Introduction

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. —John 21:4–6

It is time to seek new ways of serving God and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in our changing world. Setting aside our ties to the ways things have been and the ways we are used to doing things may open us to new ways with God where amazing new things may be possible. That’s why the 41st General Council in 2012 mandated the Comprehensive Review Task Group (“the task group”) to engage the church in a broad conversation about who we are as The United Church of Canada, how we do things, and how we can continue to live faithfully in changing times.

As members of your presbytery, district, *consistoire*, or synod,<sup>1</sup> you know profound changes are already happening in many places in our church. Fewer people are attending worship services. Fewer young adults, children, and youth are participating in our faith communities. Financial and demographic pressures mean some faith communities are getting smaller, amalgamating, or closing, while overstretched volunteers are spending more time on bureaucracy than ministry. And diminishing resources—both financial and human—are affecting our ability as local communities of faith,<sup>2</sup> regional bodies, and a denomination to make a difference in God’s world.

Our church *is* changing, and we are being called to act boldly and live out God’s mission in new ways. While different parts of our church are feeling these changes in different ways and to different degrees and some parts are adapting and even thriving, we experience them as one body in Christ. That’s why the task group—a diverse and passionate group of eight people who love and serve our church in different ways—is seeking the wisdom of the whole church as it works toward developing the recommendations it will offer to the 42nd General Council in 2015.

The task group has been listening carefully. In facilitated conversations throughout 2013 with more than 600 communities of faith, the task group heard

- a clear understanding that our church needs to change
- a strong sense of denominational identity as an open, welcoming, and justice-seeking church, as well as a yearning to share that identity more clearly and publicly
- a desire for governance that is both simpler and more effective

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, “synod” refers to Bermuda Synod, which is part of Maritime Conference.

<sup>2</sup> The task group is using the term “communities of faith” to recognize that United Church people increasingly are gathering in a variety of ways to worship, learn, and serve. These communities take, and will continue to take, many different forms. Some will be congregations as we currently know them, while others will look quite different; some will have buildings, and some will not.

- the experiences of a significant number of faith communities that are experiencing growth by imagining new ways of being in the world
- a desire for both more autonomy and connection, and access to excellent advice, training, resources, and support when needed
- a recognition that technology will be central to the church, but some help and support will be needed
- a desire for training and support for clergy and a supportive and collegial community

The task group has also widened the circle of listening by launching [www.unitedfuture.ca](http://www.unitedfuture.ca), an online forum where anyone, whether deeply involved in the church or on the fringes, can engage in conversations about our future.

Along with these conversations, the task group has spoken with committees and other groups that have responsibilities and expertise in key areas, conducted research about organizational models in other denominations and sectors, and examined research and work that others in our church have been tasked with. Now, the task group is turning to your presbytery, district, *consistoire*, or synod for wisdom that you, as parts of our body with specific expertise, experience, and responsibilities, are uniquely able to offer.

This document contains the task group's vision for the church and preliminary structural concepts the task group has developed from its conversations, research, and thinking so far. They are not recommendations but rather ideas for you to explore, test, critique, and improve. The task group recognizes that many of the details still need to be worked out, and welcomes your feedback on both the ideas in this paper and specific areas and questions you think would need attention should these ideas be developed further.

The task group is particularly seeking your wisdom in four key areas: responsibility and authority for property, oversight of communities of faith, oversight and discipline of ministers,<sup>3</sup> and the role of the Connectional Space (see section E). The task group will use your wisdom to refine its thinking and look for common wisdom as it begins to build its recommendations. While this discussion paper is focused on structure, the task group plans to consider other key issues and questions in the coming months.

Thank you for sharing your wisdom, your time, and your prayers. This is an important moment in the life of The United Church of Canada, and your faithful participation is a gift to the whole church.

Learn more about the Comprehensive Review at [www.united-church.ca/general-council/gc41/comp-review](http://www.united-church.ca/general-council/gc41/comp-review).

Meet the members of the Comprehensive Review Task Group at [www.united-church.ca/general-council/gc41/comp-review/members](http://www.united-church.ca/general-council/gc41/comp-review/members).

Read the wisdom from the faith community conversations at [www.united-church.ca/communications/news/general/140204](http://www.united-church.ca/communications/news/general/140204).

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<sup>3</sup> The United Church recognizes that all Christians have a ministry as disciples of Christ. In this paper, the term "minister" includes all streams of paid accountable ministers.

## **B. Vision: Called to Be the United Church**

Who are we and what is our vision for the future? The task group has heard that the United Church has a strong denominational identity that is centred around faith, hospitality, justice, an open theology, and interculturalism. From conversations with faith communities, we heard that we know who we are and who we want to be, and we seek a vision that will lead us into a new future. Our identity and vision will undergird the decisions we need to make about reorganizing our institutional life. In the past, invitation to church membership has involved a willingness to subscribe to a particular set of beliefs. The United Church values its role in supporting individuals and communities in their spiritual journeys of discovering and living out God's unconditional love as exemplified, proclaimed, and inspired by Jesus Christ.

The task group believes A New Creed remains a clear and succinct articulation of who we are:

**We are not alone,  
We live in God's world.**

**We believe in God:**

We are rooted and centred in God, our beginning and end, even as we celebrate our different ways of understanding and talking about God.

The United Church is committed to a progressive and thoughtful theology that offers freedom to question, explore, and engage with science and with other faiths. We seek to be a church where people encounter God in a way that is real, passionate, and life-changing, the God

**who has created and is creating,  
who has come in Jesus,  
the Word made flesh,  
to reconcile and make new,  
who works in us and others  
by the Spirit.**

**We trust in God.**

We yearn to follow Jesus and to be filled with the powerful energy of the Holy Spirit.

**We are called to be the Church...**

Vibrant communities of faith are the basic expression of what it means to be church. These communities will take many different forms. Some will be congregations as we currently know them, while others will take a different form; some will have buildings, and some will not. For God is at work doing a new thing, and we can be a part of this new thing God is doing. We are called to support these fresh expressions of being church by changing structures, providing resources, and encouraging leadership.

Whatever form these communities of faith take, they will support people in their spiritual journeys as together we discover what it means to follow Jesus, and learn, live, and practise our faith.

People will be inspired and equipped to engage in ministry in the world, as God is calling us to do. As we find ourselves on the margins, disconnected from political and social power, we affirm Jesus' call to add flavour and leavening to the world, like salt, yeast, and mustard seed.

Communities of faith will be rooted in radical hospitality and will be inclusive, diverse, committed to becoming intercultural, and a safe space for all. Everyone is welcome; the table of communion is open to all.

While local communities of faith will be the primary expression of our church, we will also continue to be a church in the world with a clear identity and voice. While the current multi-layered structures must change, we remain committed to maintaining our connections and wider relationships.

**We are called to be the Church:  
to celebrate God's presence...**

There are many ways to celebrate God's presence. Inspiring worship will be a hallmark of many vibrant communities of faith, and we will celebrate the many ways it can happen, from simple prayer to more complex liturgies in varied times, locations, styles, and music. God's presence can also be celebrated in practices of discernment and service.

**We are called to be the Church...  
to live with respect in Creation,  
to love and serve others,  
to seek justice and resist evil...**

Communities of faith are called to participate in God's vision of a changed world—to do justice, love and serve neighbours in need, engage in the real life of the communities in which they find themselves, and challenge the structures and systems that exclude the poor and the marginalized.

In particular, we name our commitment to living out our apologies to First Nations peoples, and to the ongoing journey of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples toward reconciliation and right relations.

In this ministry of justice, there is a role for regional and national structures when addressing issues at the provincial, national, and global level; however, local communities of faith need to be connected with and supportive of this work.

**We are called to be the Church...  
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,  
our judge and our hope.**

We are called to find new ways of sharing our faith.

Actions of love and justice are ways of proclaiming our faith, and we must also be ready, when asked, to talk about what motivates us—the why—and ready to tell others about the good news embodied in Jesus Christ. We must be ready to invite others into community, and ultimately into relationship with the God who overcomes injustice.

We are called to be communities of hope and love, sustained by God, who is always with us. In a world where there is loneliness, despair, and a deep anxiety about the meaning and

purpose of our lives in an infinitely vast cosmos, where we humans seem hell-bent on laying waste to the world, and where justice and peace seem so distant, we are called to proclaim:

**In life, in death, in life beyond death,  
God is with us.  
We are not alone,**

**Thanks be to God.**

And so we say to the world:

**You are not alone.** You are held in the embrace of Holiness, in the love of God. You have a place in the web of creation, with all your relations. You belong. You are invited into a community of love, a network of relationships. Members of that community, followers of Jesus, are committed to love their neighbour with no exceptions, to be there for each other, and to be there for you.

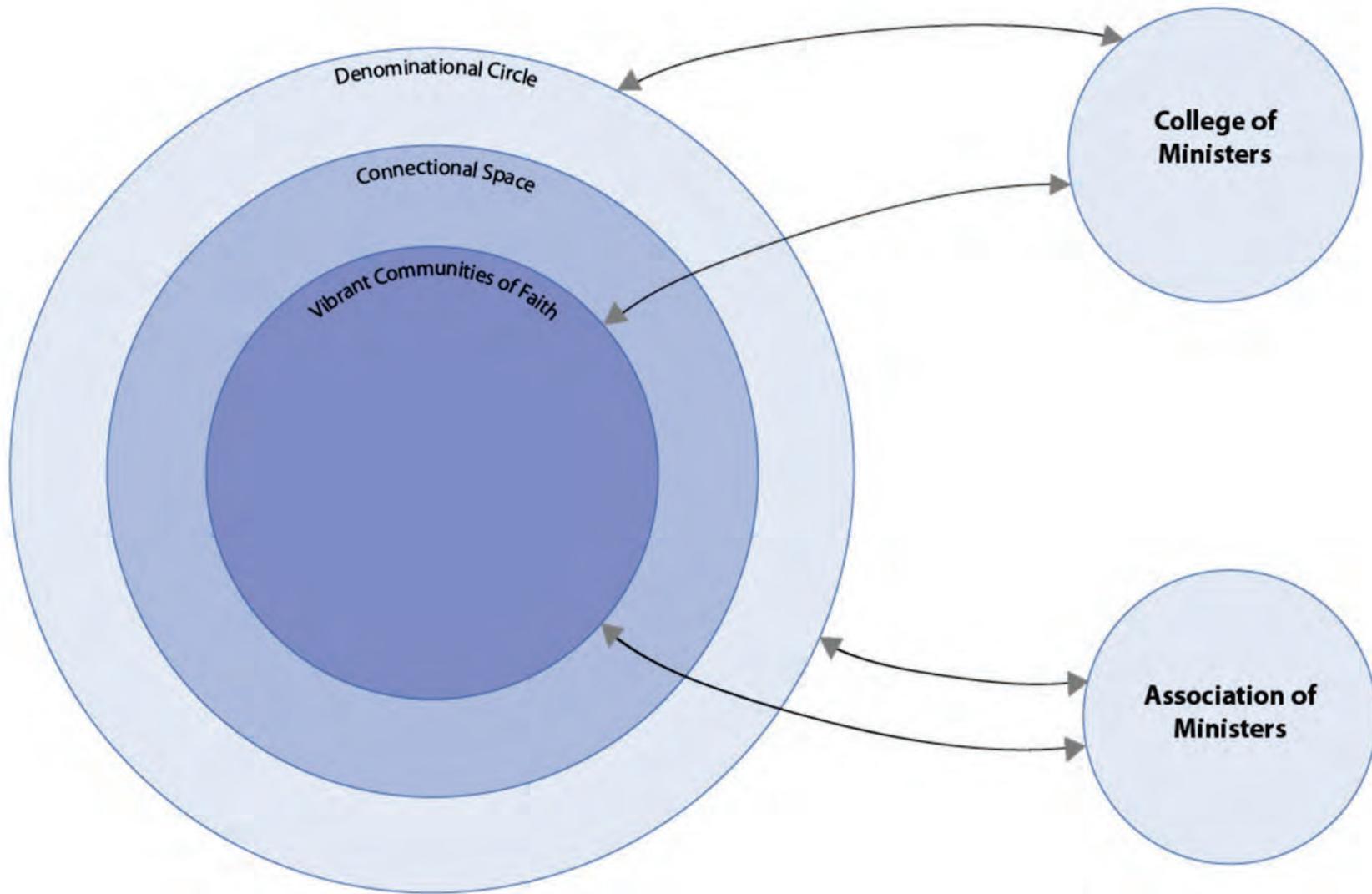
### **C. Building a New Church**

The task group has developed the following principles to guide its preliminary thinking and provide a foundation for the recommendations it will offer to the 42nd General Council. These principles reflect the wisdom the task group has heard from the church, its research, and discussions within the task group. As a church:

- We want to be a communion of peoples whose purpose is to partner with God's mission. Strong and vibrant communities of faith—both congregations as we know them and new kinds of communities—will be at the core of our church, and will support people in their spiritual journeys and inspire and equip them to participate in God's vision of a changed world.
- We want our structures to support and enable these communities of faith, and will focus on relationships and connections.
- We want groups of communities of faith to gather together for worship, mutual support, and faithful action, instead of governance.
- We want to continue to discern a strong denominational voice through engagement in deep discussion among people from a variety of contexts and with a variety of views.
- We want to build networks for mission, worship, partnership, and justice, with staff enabling connections.
- We want our structures and policies to
  - support effective, dynamic leadership
  - be adaptable and nimble
  - encourage capacity of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to live into right relations
  - be sustainable within available human and financial resources
- We want to support and nurture ministers.
- We want to ensure effective and efficient oversight and discipline of ministers.

### **D. A New Model**

What would our church look like if our structures served primarily to support, enable, and connect communities of faith rather than to set and enforce rules, while still expressing a strong denominational identity and voice?



To replace our current court structure, the task group has been envisioning a model of concentric circles that places vibrant communities of faith at the core and encircles them with support, advice, services, and resources. This support would be located sufficiently close to communities of faith to be accessible, relevant, and timely, and take into account regional contexts, diversity, and needs. Distinct supporting and decision-making functions would be assigned to the three circles, in relationship with two new bodies: a College of Ministers that would license, oversee, and when necessary, discipline ministers; and an Association of Ministers that would offer collegial support, advice, advocacy on ministry leadership issues, and continuing education.

As depicted in the graphic, this model would include the following key elements. Should these ideas be developed further, many details would have to be worked out, and the task group welcomes your feedback on questions and issues that would require attention.

### **Vibrant Communities of Faith**

Communities of faith would be at the centre of this model. Communities of faith would include any community of people that gathers to explore faith, worship, and serve, including congregations as we know them, outreach ministries, faith-based communal living, house churches, online communities, and others. Communities of faith would make decisions in the following areas:

- the life of the community, including worship, care, spiritual practice, and learning
- leadership
- local administration
- property
- mission and justice

Communities of faith would be able to access support, resources, services, and advice in the Denominational Circle and the Connectional Space.

### **Denominational Circle**

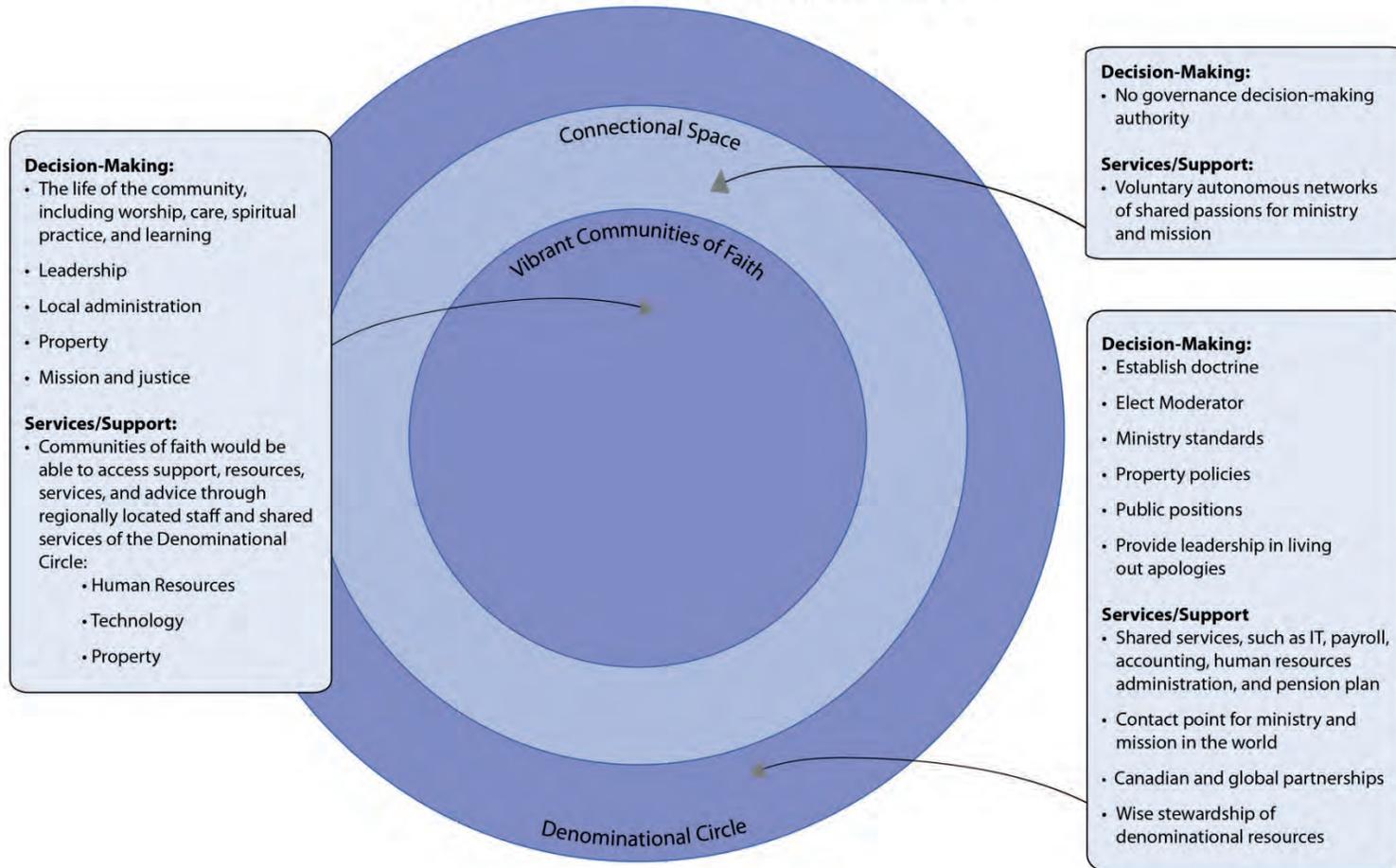
A Denominational Circle would provide a national voice and identity for our church. It would make decisions in some areas and provide support in others. A body composed of members elected by each community of faith would have the following responsibilities:

- establishing doctrine
- electing a Moderator
- taking public positions
- setting ministry standards
- ordaining, commissioning, and designating ministers
- setting policies on property
- providing leadership in living out the apologies and into reconciliation and right relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples

Denominational staff would provide the following support:

- providing shared services such as information technology, payroll, accounting, human resources administration, and the pension plan
- bearing witness by serving as the contact point for ministry and mission in the world
- establishing and maintaining Canadian and global partnerships
- providing wise stewardship of our resources

### A Closer Look: Roles and Responsibilities



Some denominational staff would be located in the regions and would provide services, support, and advice to communities of faith and networks within the Connectional Space.

## Connectional Space

When consulted, communities of faith expressed a strong desire for connection with each other and with the wider church. The Connectional Space, depicted between the Denominational Circle and the communities of faith, would nurture the growth of networks of people with like interests. People would come together voluntarily to live out shared passions for ministry and mission. Some networks might be more permanent, like a youth ministry network or a musicians' network. Others might form around an issue or an opportunity and be more temporary. They might be geographic but not necessarily.

Denominational staff located in the regions would facilitate connections, help uncover resources, and provide expertise. It would be possible for an expert to resource a network without actually working in the same region (e.g., a housing expert in the Prairies could support a housing co-op planning team composed of people from several communities in Halifax). Networks could grow organically or be initiated by regional staff members. The size, composition, and duration of those networks would vary depending on the purpose of the network. The regionally located denominational staff would also be deployed to support congregations that request advice or expertise.

Presbyteries and Conferences would no longer exist as “courts” of the church. In this model, the Connectional Space would not be a court and would not have governance decision-making authority. Networks within the Connectional Space would make their own decisions about their mission and ministry, and resource them accordingly.

The task group wants your advice on whether this model will

- keep worship and the practice of our faith at the centre of all that we do, while maintaining important connections
- better reflect the realities of our church
- free up time and money (resources) from governance to ministry and mission
- support ministers and lay leaders
- provide a strong denominational voice

For a comparison of this “circle” model with our current structures, please see Appendix A.

## Ministry Leadership

Ministry leadership is and always will be at the heart of our church. To address the goals of the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project in a simplified structure without regional courts, we are offering an alternative model to support our ministers in changing times.

The admission of candidates to ministry, standards for ministry, and oversight and discipline of ministers must continue to be done in the future church. In addition, ministers want collegiality and support. Our current model places oversight and discipline and collegial support in the same local body—presbytery. Often the result is that neither function is done effectively: addressing problems with ministers through a body of peers can be inefficient and costly, and diverts time and energy from local mission and ministry; ministers often feel they cannot turn for support and collegiality to peers who are also responsible for oversight and discipline. The Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships Project, which

was approved by the 41st General Council for testing and is currently undergoing testing in 10 Conferences, seeks to separate collegiality and support for ministers from oversight and discipline by shifting these functions from presbytery to Conference. The task group recognizes that much good work has been done and is keeping in close touch with the Project Management Group as this work continues.

The task group shares the goals of the Effective Leadership project and offers another possibility that would place these functions in two new bodies:

- a **College of Ministers** that would license, oversee, and discipline ministers
- an **Association of Ministers** that would offer collegial support, advice, advocacy on ministry leadership issues, and continuing education

A College could ensure a more professional, timely, and fair process for licensing, oversight, and discipline of ministers. People doing the work of the College would be, or become, more experienced in this important work, thus ensuring more consistent results. The task group expects the human and financial resources needed to carry out these functions would be lower than in the current system because these responsibilities would lie with one body instead of with approximately 90 presbyteries.

### College of Ministers

Ministers are highly educated professionals who are called by God to ministry. As a denomination, we must set admission criteria for candidates, establish standards for ministry, and have oversight and discipline of our ministers when problems arise.

Lay members who are or have been teachers, nurses, accountants, doctors, social workers, and members of other professions have been regulated by professional bodies such as colleges or boards that license professionals, set standards of practice and annual continuing education requirements, and discipline their members. A College of Ministers would be established by the denomination to carry out these functions for ministers and uphold the professional standards set by the denomination.

Membership in the College would be mandatory for all ministers serving communities of faith. Candidates would be student members. Communities of faith could engage only members of the College.

The denomination would continue to set doctrine and policy for ministry, establish the streams of ministry, and set the requirements for each stream. The denomination would continue to ordain, commission, and recognize ministers. It would also continue to establish competencies for ministers and to set out the requirements for annual continuing education.

The College would implement denominational policies on licensing, oversee the conduct of ministers, investigate complaints about ministers, conduct formal hearings, and discipline ministers where necessary. The College would be governed by a body composed of an equal number of ministers and lay people.

For more information about how a College of Ministers could function, please see Appendix B.

### Association of Ministers

An Association of United Church Ministers would provide ministers with support, advocacy, collegiality, and continuing education, and represent their interests within the church. The Association would be national in scope but could have provincial, regional, or local chapters,

or chapters associated with different streams of ministry. All ministers of the United Church would be eligible to join the Association as full members. Retired ministers might be in a special category. Candidates could be student members.

The activities of the Association would be determined by its members but could include

- being the voice of ministers of the United Church
- providing support to ministers by encouraging excellence, offering career planning, and supporting them with mental health issues such as drug or alcohol abuse
- providing continuing education for ministers
- providing advice to ministers in dealings with their communities of faith, including in hiring, negotiating the terms and conditions, disputes during employment, and termination
- providing advice and representation to ministers with respect to College matters
- providing advice, support, and mentorship for student members during internships and calling, and in dealing with the College
- helping retired members deal with pension and benefits issues
- advocating around salaries, benefits, and pension plans
- electing the ministerial members of the College

Ministers would be required to pay for the Association's activities, but would not be required to be members. This would ensure that all ministers would pay for activities they would benefit from. The denomination might provide funds for specific activities of the Association, such as developing and delivering continuing education programs.

The Association might have paid professional staff, including the equivalent of Personnel Ministers who might be located in regions and provide advice. The Association could contract for insurance for some of its services (as do nurses, doctors, dentists, etc.), economic and pension advice, and legal advice.

## **E. Seeking Your Wisdom: Four Key Points for Discussion**

As a body, please answer at least one of parts 1 to 4, and both 5 and 6. As stated in the introduction, the task group is particularly seeking your wisdom in four key areas: property, oversight of faith communities, oversight of ministers, and the role of the Connectional Space. When you have completed your discussion on each area, please indicate to what extent you agree with the statements provided on a scale of 1–7, where 1 means strongly disagree, 4 means neutral, and 7 means strongly agree, and share your reasons and wisdom in the comments sections.

### **1. Property**

Through conversations with communities of faith, we have heard that as many as 30 percent expect they may merge or cease to exist by 2025. Disposition of real estate and other assets will need attention. In the current model, congregations must get the approval of presbytery or an equivalent body to acquire, sell, mortgage, exchange, lease, or otherwise deal with congregational property.

In the Circle model, communities of faith would have the right to deal with their property as they see fit, subject to legal requirements and a denominational safety net. Communities of faith would be able to seek advice online from the denominational website, property specialists in regional offices, legal counsel within the denomination, or a lawyer. There would continue to be provision, as there is in the current *Manual*, for the denomination to

appoint an administrator to handle the affairs of a community of faith in unusual circumstances.

#### Discussion Point

1. Responsibility and authority for property should rest only with communities of faith. They would be able to seek expertise/support from the larger church.

Strongly Disagree 1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7 Strongly Agree

Your reasons/wisdom:

## 2. Oversight of Communities of Faith

Except in unusual circumstances, the suggested model would have no oversight of communities of faith. If they request it, support and resources would be available, and networks and gatherings would be facilitated in the Connectional Space. The denomination would provide a “safety net” to appoint an administrator to handle the affairs of a community of faith in unusual circumstances.

#### Discussion Point

2. The model of obligatory oversight should be replaced by a model in which communities of faith may request and would be provided with support as needed.

Strongly Disagree 1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7 Strongly Agree

Your reasons/wisdom:

## 3. Oversight of Ministers

The Effective Leadership project was established to address the perceived need, in current legal and human rights structures, to separate collegial support of ministers from the processes necessary when a minister is in trouble. It also seeks to address concerns that volunteers who may have little experience are overstretched by the challenges of effective human resource management, and the perception that members of Ministry and Personnel committees or Pastoral Relations committees may have roles that conflict. Some find it difficult to create a trusting atmosphere among members of presbyteries when information shared may be used in ministerial reviews.

#### Discussion Points

3. (a) A College would be more effective than our current Ministry and Personnel, Education and Students, and disciplinary processes.

Strongly Disagree 1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7 Strongly Agree

Your reasons/wisdom:

- (b) A College with responsibility for licensing, oversight, and discipline of ministers would achieve the goals of the Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships project.

Strongly Disagree 1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7 Strongly Agree

Your reasons/wisdom:

- (c) An Association of Ministers would provide more effective collegial support, opportunities for continuing education, and a voice for ministers than the current system.

Strongly Disagree 1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7 Strongly Agree

Your reasons/wisdom:

- (d) Participation in such an Association should be voluntary for ministers, although all would contribute to it financially.

Strongly Disagree 1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7 Strongly Agree

Your reasons/wisdom:

#### 4. Connectional Space

The Connectional Space would address the need to gather for mutual support and to build networks. In the Connectional Space, regionally located staff would provide expertise, advice, and support at the request of a community of faith. In this model, the Connectional Space would not be a court and would not have governance decision-making authority.

##### Discussion Points

4. (a) The Connectional Space should have no governance decision-making authority. Autonomous networks would effectively fulfill the expressed need for connection for ministry and mission.

Strongly Disagree 1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7 Strongly Agree

Your reasons/wisdom:

- (b) If you disagree or strongly disagree (i.e., your answer is 1-3), please indicate in which areas you believe the Connectional Space, structured as a court, should have decision-making authority. Why?

## 5. Overall Opinion

The task group has identified from its research, consultation, and prayerful consideration that the goals of the United Church are to

- keep worship and the practice of our faith at the centre of all that we do, while maintaining important connections
- better reflect the realities of our church
- free up time and money (resources) from governance to mission and ministry
- support ministers and lay leaders
- provide a strong denominational voice

### Discussion Point

5. Overall, the ideas offered in this package would effectively meet the above goals and should be developed further as a basis for recommendations to the 42nd General Council (2015).

Strongly Disagree 1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7 Strongly Agree

Your reasons/wisdom:

## 6. Next Steps

Thank you for taking the time as a group to engage in this important conversation. The task group will prayerfully consider your wisdom, along with other feedback, as it begins to formulate its recommendations.

### Discussion Point

6. If there are questions or observations arising from this conversation that you would like to bring to the task group's attention, please tell us below.

## Appendix A: Comparing the Current Model and the Circle Model

	Current	Circle
<b>Membership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The denomination establishes rules for membership in a community of faith. Using those rules, the community of faith, or its church council, determines who is a member and who is permitted to serve on the council and vote at community meetings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No change</li> </ul>
<b>Structure of Communities of Faith</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The denomination sets out options for the structure of a community of faith and for holding assets such as land and buildings. The community of faith determines which option will work best for them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No change</li> </ul>
<b>Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The denomination establishes the doctrine and polity for these sacraments and other events. Each community of faith establishes its own policies consistent with this doctrine and polity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same</li> </ul>
<b>Relationships with Other United Church Communities of Faith</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each congregation belongs to a presbytery, which can choose to do mission, justice, advocacy, and outreach work in the community. The cost of this mission comes from the assessment each congregation pays.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communities of faith would be encouraged to work with other communities of faith on community ministry and mission projects. Such shared activities could be joint ventures, time-limited, and with defined contributions of time and money. For example, youth ministry might be a shared activity.</li> </ul>
<b>Mission and Outreach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mission and outreach (local and global) may be done by a community of faith and in partnership with other communities of faith, including from other denominations. Leadership, particularly for global mission and outreach, is provided by General Council staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same</li> </ul>

<p><b>Hiring and Terminating Ministers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presbyteries must be part of the Joint Needs Assessment Committee and the search processes. Presbyteries, congregations, and ministers are in a three-way covenant relationship.</li> <li>• If a congregation wants to end a pastoral relationship, it must seek the approval of the presbytery, which, if it approves, sets the length of notice to be given to the minister. If a presbytery has concerns about the conduct of a minister, it may end the pastoral relationship over the objections of the congregation.</li> <li>• Effective Leadership and Healthy Pastoral Relationships trials are underway across the country.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities of faith would determine their own hiring processes and select their ministers, who would have to be licensed by the College. A community of faith would be wise to enter into an agreement on the terms and conditions of employment, including termination.</li> <li>• Communities of faith would be wise to get human resources support from the website of the denomination, from Personnel Ministers in the Connectional Space, from legal counsel in the Denominational Circle, or from a lawyer.</li> <li>• The minister could seek advice and services from the Association to assist in negotiating duties, salary, benefits, and termination.</li> <li>• A community of faith could terminate the services of a minister by providing notice or money in lieu of notice. The amount of notice would be set out in the agreement or at common law.</li> <li>• If a community of faith alleged that it had cause to terminate the minister, it would be obliged to report the termination and reasons to the College.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Oversight of Ministers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presbyteries have oversight of ministers and may discipline them, including recommending that they be placed on the Discontinued Service List.</li> <li>• Standards would be set by the denomination.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The College would have oversight of ministers. Communities of faith that terminated a minister for cause would be obliged to report the termination to the College. Complaints about a minister would be sent to the College.</li> <li>• Standards would be set by the denomination.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Oversight of Congregations/Services</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presbyteries have oversight of congregations, including the authority to give directions, end pastoral relationships, and disband.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There would be no oversight of communities of faith.</li> <li>• There would continue to be provision, as there is in the current <i>Manual</i>, for the denomination to appoint an administrator to handle the affairs of the community of faith in unusual circumstances.</li> <li>• Communities of faith would be able to seek advice from the denominational website, Personnel Ministers in regional offices, legal counsel at the denominational level, or a lawyer.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Property and Assets</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congregations must get the approval of presbytery to acquire, sell, mortgage, exchange, lease, or otherwise deal with congregational property.</li> <li>• The disposition of the funds must be approved by the presbytery or the Conference, depending on the situation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities of faith would have the right to deal with their property as they see fit subject to denominational policies, the requirements of the Canada Revenue Agency (e.g., cannot divide the proceeds among its members), and subject to a safety net.</li> <li>• If the denomination determined that the community of faith was in an unsatisfactory state (dysfunctional, imprudent, or proposing to take actions contrary to the polity of the United Church), it could appoint an administrator to run the community of faith and assume all the powers of the church council.</li> <li>• Communities of faith would be able to seek advice from the denominational website, property specialists in the field, legal counsel in the Denominational Circle, or a lawyer.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Council of the Denomination</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conferences elect lay people and ministers as delegates to General Council, which is held every three years.</li> <li>• An executive is elected and charged with continuing the work between sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each community of faith would elect a representative as its delegate to a denominational council, which would be held perhaps every five years.</li> <li>• An executive would be elected and charged with continuing work between sessions.</li> </ul>

## Appendix B: A Model for a College of Ministers

The College would be governed by a Council: half would be ministers elected by members of the College and half lay people elected by the denomination. The representation of Aboriginal ministries would be essential. Regional diversity would also be essential, as well as proportional representation by streams of ministry. Members of the College Council would sit on one of three boards:

- The **Faith and Theology Board** would apply standards for entry into ministry. It would include equal numbers of ministers and lay people from the Council. It would sit in three-person panels to assess candidates to be licensed and, in cases of dispute, conduct formal hearings.
- The **Assessment Board** would deal with complaints about ministers. It would also include equal numbers of ministers and lay people from the Council and would sit in three-person panels to assess complaints about ministers. It would have the power to order investigations where warranted and would determine the appropriate disposition, including closing the file, attempting mediation, issuing a caution (warning), or ordering a formal hearing.
- The **Hearings Board** would conduct hearings into complaints about ministers. It would include equal numbers of ministers and lay people from the Council and would sit in three-person formal hearing panels to hear evidence about the complaint, make findings of fact and law, and determine the appropriate disposition.

The College would have a registrar and resource staff for the Council and for the three boards. The number of staff would be very small.

### How Would the College Function?

As an example, the denomination might decide that the pathway to ordination must include successful discernment, academic and practical training, a supervised internship, and a successful interview. The denomination could decide that an accompanying committee would be an asset.

Candidates would submit evidence of completion of these requirements to support their application to be licensed. This documentation would be reviewed by College staff. Questions such as equivalencies would be dealt with by a panel of the Faith and Theology Board. The denomination would celebrate at regional events the ordination, commissioning, designation, or acceptance for transfer of those candidates the College found to have met the requirements of that pathway to ministry. Currently, the function of assessing students is the work of presbyteries and Conferences.

Complaints about ministers, including concerns about capacity and complaints of sexual abuse would be sent to the College. If a community of faith terminated a minister for cause, it would be required to notify the College. The College would advise the minister of the complaint and seek a response. The complaint and response would be assessed, and where warranted, a person might be appointed to investigate the complaint. In serious cases, a formal hearing would be held. Currently, the function of oversight and discipline of ministers is the work of presbyteries and Conferences.

# A College of Ministers

