

## **NIC01 NATIONAL INDIGENOUS CIRCLE – RESTRUCTURING OF INDIGENOUS CHURCH**

### **Origin: National Indigenous Council**

#### **1. What is the issue?**

We believe Creator is calling us to continue constructing the governance framework of the National Indigenous<sup>1</sup> Circle.<sup>2</sup> This work necessitates changes to the United Church’s structure so that it properly reflects the governance of the Indigenous United Church and its relationship to the General Council and General Council Executive.

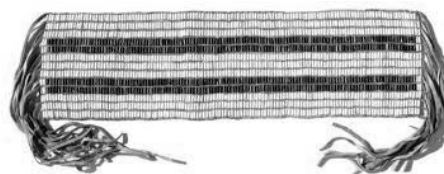
#### **2. Why is this issue important?**

The Indigenous Ministries of The United Church of Canada have a long history. Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries came among us in the nineteenth century. Many of these missionaries were Indigenous. Our oldest congregation, the Grand River Methodist Mission, has been serving the people since 1825. In 1925, the United Church was born through the act of union. The Indigenous churches of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches were not consulted about union, they were simply moved between institutions and became United Church “missions.” The first act of the United Church treated us “like children” unable to make our own decisions, and defending our rights as autonomous Nations has been a struggle ever since.

Indigenous people have met regularly over many decades and held deep and ongoing conversations about matters relating to our Indigenous Ministries and our relationship with the United Church. We have been evolving, struggling, adapting, and growing since church union. Unwittingly, the church restructuring of 2018, caused crisis in the National Indigenous Circle by destabilizing our ways of working together.

It is time for us to move towards a different relationship. It is time to set aside the notion of “missions to the Indians” and truly move towards being “partners in God’s call to all the earth.”

This means a change in structure for The United Church of Canada. The Haudenosaunee speak of the Two-Row Wampum. This covenant speaks of our two peoples traveling down a river, each in their own canoe. With respect, we need to allow one another to simply be who



we are. It is time to remember this covenant and work as two bodies side by side – the United Church with all its complexity, the National Indigenous Circle with similar complexity. Together we will support each other’s journey.

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<sup>1</sup> By using the term Indigenous, First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples are included.

<sup>2</sup> The National Indigenous Circle embraces all Indigenous Ministries of the United Church of Canada across the land, both urban and rural. The National Indigenous Council is the Executive of that body.

This proposal begins to address the Indigenous framework envisioned in the *Calls to the Church* and accepted by General Council 43. It is the next step in creating a truly Indigenous United Church.

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

The United Church of Canada has adopted the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). The Declaration identifies six key principles:

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

This proposal begins to put into action these principles, and therefore begins to address in concrete terms the church's stated commitment to equity.

The United Church, at General Council 43, also adopted the [Calls to the Church](#) from the Caretakers of our Indigenous Circle as the basis for a new relationship between the United Church and the National Indigenous Circle.

- The framework for the National Indigenous Circle's governance structure is laid out in 5.B of the *Calls to the Church*.

### **4. How might the General Council respond to the issue?**

The National Indigenous Council proposes that the 44th General Council act on the issue of autonomy of the Indigenous Church by directing the General Secretary to

- a) identify and remove all the structural barriers to developing and sustaining an autonomous Indigenous Church within The United Church of Canada, consistent with the Caretakers Calls to the Church and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- b) continue the conversation of restructuring, right relations, and reparations with the National Indigenous Circle; and,
- c) report back to General Council 45 on the state of the dialogue and required next steps.