



## Press Release

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For: Immediate Release

**UNITED CHURCH MEETS TO CHART A NEW PATH**

The United Church of Canada gathers at Durham College + University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Oshawa, Ontario, for its 43rd General Council (July 21–27, 2018), bringing together over 350 commissioners (delegates) from across the country to make some of the most important decisions in the church's history. Among the important issues will be a decision to form a new equal partnership with Indigenous members.

The Council will be asked to ratify earlier decisions on a massive restructuring to a smaller and simpler governance structure that reflects the church's changing place in Canadian society. As well, Commissioners will be choosing a new Moderator from a field of 10 candidates. The Moderator is the spiritual leader of the denomination for a three-year term.

As it continues to conform and learn from its past and fulfill its commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the church will be voting whether to enter into a new partnership with Indigenous members. A report to the church by The Caretakers of the Indigenous Circle, which included Indigenous elders, states, "We, the Indigenous ministries and communities of faith of the United Church, declare that we will tell our own story of what ministry means for us. We will decide for ourselves who we are, who constitutes our ministries groups and practices." The Rev. Maggie Dieter, Executive Minister of Aboriginal Ministries and Indigenous Justice explains, "The Indigenous church seeks deeper, more meaningful, relationships with the church. It seeks to 'braid' Indigenous knowledge and ways of being into the fabric of the church, so everyone will be transformed and grow together."

Created in 1925 through the union of the Methodist, the Congregational, and two-thirds of the Presbyterian churches, The United Church of Canada has a White, English-speaking majority in the midst of a country that is increasingly diverse racially, culturally and linguistically. Two major themes will challenge the Commissioners to look at the church's identity and vision in the 21st century as well as its lack of diversity. "Those of us who are White people need to examine the conscious and unconscious ways we cling to power and control. All of us are made in the image of God, and the church needs to belong to all of God's beloved. For too long, White people have acted like it belongs only to us," says the Rt. Rev. Jordan Cantwell, the church's Moderator.

The elected Commissioners will also encounter the collected stories and experiences of the LGBTQIA2+ community through an evening play and a week-long art installation. Part of a major project known as Iridesce: The Living Apology, the stories are all from those affected by the church's 1988 decision that sexual orientation is not a barrier to membership or ministry. The response to the decision almost split



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the church, and 30 years later it is hoped that the Iridesce project will be part of the ongoing process of healing and reconciliation between members of the LGBTQIA2+ community and the wider church. These stories would help to inform a possible apology, to be determined after additional study and reflection at the church's next General Council in 2021.

Under the theme of Risking Faith, Daring Hope, the 2018 General Council will begin with its first-ever two-day Festival of Faith (July 21–22), bringing together artists, musicians, activists and authors, each offering their take on progressive Christianity in the 21st century. It's a wide-open event across the Durham College campus with a mix of serious workshops and fun activities for families. "We want people to see that the church is much more than buildings," says Nora Sanders, the United Church's General Secretary. "Laughter, play and celebration are a genuine part of experiencing and sharing our faith."

<https://www.united-church.ca/events/43rd-general-council-and-festival-faith>

Follow on social media: #gc43, #gcfaithfest

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