

Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council

Proposal 6 A proposal to allow adherents to be elected to Governing Bodies of Communities of Faith in the United Church of Canada.

Origin: Glen Morris United Church, Official Board

Congregational Support Commission, Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council

1. What is the issue? Why is it important?

Glen Morris United Church and likely other small churches have difficulty filling all positions on their Governing Bodies due to the limited number of full members in their congregations. Many adherents are faithful and devout Christians who possess skills and resources to become invaluable members of Governing Bodies. They are willing to be nominated and elected to Governing Bodies to contribute to the life of work of their churches. This is an important issue since it very likely affects United Churches throughout Canada.

2. What is happening now?

The Manual of the United Church of Canada (Bylaw B7.3.1) restricts (lay) membership on Governing Bodies to full members, with one exception – if Regional Council grants approval of an exception based on “special circumstances”. The Manual does not provide a reason for this restriction on adherents; it does not give any definition of “special circumstances”; and it does not clarify the “exception” granting process.

3. What is the recommendation?

It is the recommendation of the Official Board of Glen Morris United Church that General Council revise The Manual Bylaw B7.3.1. as follows:

B7.3.1. General

The Governing Body has the following members:

A The full members of the congregation elected by the congregation or pastoral charge

Change to read: The full members and adherents of the congregation elected by the congregation or pastoral charge, **with the majority being full members of the congregation.**

B Unchanged

C Unchanged

D Unchanged

E Unchanged

EXCEPTION CLAUSE - change

Exception: In special circumstances with the regional council’s approval.

There is one exception to the requirement in paragraphs (a) and (e) above for governing body members to be full members of the congregation: **If a congregation wants to name a governing body with less than 50% as full members, they must seek regional council approval.**

4. Background information:

Glen Morris is a true community church. Our 2023 Membership Roll lists 72 resident full members and 35 adherents, so adherents represent 33% of our congregation. Being the only place of worship in the Village of Glen Morris, the church has attracted a congregation that hails from various religious and denominational backgrounds. Our congregation includes Anglicans, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and probably others who, understandably have not become full members. People have their own reasons for not wishing to be full members, which we should not question. Consequently, we

have a disproportionate number of faithful, supportive and deeply involved adherents who willingly give of their time and talent to advance the interests of our pastoral charge. This extends to their commitment to the spiritual life of the church, as evidenced by their participation in publicly reciting various affirmations of faith or creeds during church services. In addition to this, there is the option of having a covenanting service with all elected officials so that there is a sense of dedication to the community of faith for all people serving (regardless of their membership status).

To deny adherents a formal place on our Official Board is antithetical to the full potential of our Governing Body. This situation is all the more problematic since (like other churches), we have a small number of resident full members (72). Some of those members do not take any part in the life and work of the church, so they are not considered candidates for nomination to the Official Board. Our church has 35 supporting adherents, some of whom are similarly inactive in their attendance and contribution to the church, so they would not be considered candidates for nomination either.

We take reassurance from the following principle in the Preamble to The Manual: *“The Manual must strike a balance between enough regulation for the United Church to function in a fair and orderly way, and enough flexibility so that courts/councils and people are free to carry out ministry in ways, both traditional and innovative, that meet local needs”*. The Preamble goes on to elaborate on this principle as follows: *“The United Church exists in a wide variety of contexts. There have always been challenges in setting policies and procedures for ministry settings that may be urban, rural, large, small, and that differ in the strength of their human and financial resources. The focus in The Manual is on broad policy statements rather than specific provisions for every conceivable situation because ... this invites people to think for themselves by acting in the spirit of the policies with good will and common sense to achieve a just result in a particular situation”*.

5. How does this proposal help us to live into our church’s commitments on equity?

This proposal creates opportunities for people to discern their faith journeys by experiencing the fullness of the life and work of the church which can be particularly meaningful for people who are either newcomers to Canada and still learning about the denomination; for those who have left other churches; and for those who are healing wounds related to religious-based trauma.

It is also possible that more Indigenous People, members of minority groups, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, and people with disabilities will be nominated for membership on Governing Bodies if the larger pool of candidates includes both adherents and full members.

For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:

Please select the appropriate option and provide the key discussion points for items being forwarded to the General Council:

- Agree
- Disagree without forwarding to the General Council
- Disagree and forwarding to the General Council
- Take no action at this time

Comments _____

Who will present (by pre-recorded video) this proposal on behalf of the transmitting body?

Email contact:

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to: GC45@united-church.ca