

2020 REMIT AND PROPOSALS

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| 1) Remit 1 | General Council |
| 2) Banning Conversion Therapy in Saskatchewan | Grosvenor Park United Church
Saskatoon |
| 3) Removing or reducing the 20% extra regional assessment for 2021. | Living Skies Regional Council
Executive |

**Remit 1: Background and resources for delegates
2020 Regional Gatherings/ Regional Council annual meetings
(Prairie to Pine, Northern Spirit, and Living Skies)**

Remit 1 proposes a simple but very important change to the language describing who is eligible to be a minister. Here are some short resources to help voting delegates understand how the Remit works; what the proposed change is; why it makes a difference; and further resources.

This is a Category 1 Remit, and so requires a vote by the regional councils (communities of faith do not vote on this remit.) If approved by a two-thirds majority of regional councils, the Executive of the General Council may declare that the remit has passed and, if so, the policy change will automatically come into effect as of March 1, 2021. [Background from General Council 43.](#)

Current wording: “The Order of Ministry shall be open to both men and women.

The Question:

Does the Regional Council agree that:

- (a) the Order of Ministry be open to persons of all gender identities; and
- (b) the Basis of Union be amended to reflect this change as follows:

10.0 The Order of Ministry shall be open to persons of all gender identities.

Background

Briefly, the proposed wording change reflects the reality that there are more than two genders (male and female, or “men and women”, as the current wording in the Manual says).

Gender is a human idea, a social and cultural construct. Gender is not based in biology, and that can be particularly true for intersex, non-binary, trans, agender, and genderqueer people.

The “gender binary” is also a social and cultural idea. While dominant Canadian cultures teaches that there are only two genders (male and female), diverse lived experiences show that this is not true. In fact, even biological sex itself not a binary, as the lives and experiences of intersex people show.

Diverse cultures and traditions, and the Bible itself, tell us that an exclusive gender binary does not reflect all cultures and experiences. For example, some rabbinical authorities have identified up to [six genders in Jewish scripture](#). Other Biblical scholars are challenging overly simplistic interpretations of “eunuch”, and exploring this ancient identity’s nuances.

Today, some First Nations and Inuit nations are reclaiming their traditional and historical understandings of gender, in which a binary did not exist, or did not exist in the way dominant Canadian society now understands it. The English term “Two Spirit” is one reflection of diverse and powerful Indigenous understandings of gender.

Language can be a powerful force for inclusion or exclusion. At one time, women were barred from ministry. The language governing eligibility for ministry changed once women were permitted to exercise their ministry. But the wording reflects a gender binary that does not include a range of gender identities and expressions. Today, the proposed language at the heart of Remit 1 is intended to be a further move towards inclusion. It aims to recognize that an assumption of only two genders excludes the many people who are, or could be, ministers who serve the whole church with their spiritual gifts and their call.

Resources to help with understanding gender identity

Videos

Micah, a non-binary youth, talks with CBC about their identity and experiences:
<https://youtu.be/d37gxmX8hCk> (Running time: 1:45)

The Indigenous Doctor Helping Trans Youth: <https://youtu.be/4Hj-a5AE-VM> (12:13)
 What Does Two Spirit Mean? <https://youtu.be/A4IBibGzUnE>

Print resources

[Celebrating Gender Diversity: A Toolkit on Gender Identity & Trans Experience](#): (2019) This free toolkit is useful for all aspects of your ministry, not just this vote. It contains resources to help your community to deepen your understanding of gender identity, create welcoming and affirming communities, and integrate trans and non-binary people's gifts and capacities for ministry into the life of the church. Includes sections on faith, intersections, guides (e.g. de-gendering washrooms), workshops, handouts, terms and definitions, recommended resources, and much more.

[Gender Sexuality, and Orientation](#): a variety of United Church resources on gender, gender identity, sexuality, and sexual orientation. Downloads include:

- [Facts About Pronouns](#)
- Understanding all these words: [A glossary of key gender and sexuality terms](#)
- [A Timeline of Gender and Transgender Justice in the UCC](#)
- [A Timeline of LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit Justice in the UCC](#)
- [Transgender Justice Recommended Resources](#)

United Church webinars:

- [Celebrating Gender Diversity: Five Stories](#) (2015) Stories from five United Church trans people of faith. This webinar will help you learn more about the lived experience of trans and genderqueer people in the United Church of Canada.
- [A Trans Christian Faith Perspective](#): (March 2020) Five trans and non-binary people share a little of their personal stories, and how their Christian faith has made a difference along the way. Includes [The Difference between Sex and Gender](#), a 4-minute video on common terms and definitions.
- [Becoming a Trans Ally / Accomplice](#): (2020) Learn what it means to stand in solidarity with trans and non-binary people, to speak-out consistently, address systemic transphobia, and actively participate in witnessing to and advocating with trans and non-binary people for their rights and human dignity.

PROPOSAL NO. 1

Title: BANNING CONVERSION THERAPY IN SASKATCHEWAN

Originating Body: Grosvenor Park United Church, Saskatoon

1. What is the issue?

- We believe in a God of unconditional love, Jesus who is love incarnate, who seeks to uplift those who are on the margins of society, and the Spirit who calls us to seek justice and reduce harm for those who are diverse with respect to gender, gender expression and sexual orientation.
- Conversion therapy gives a message that those who are not cisgender and/or heteronormative need to be “fixed”. Therapies which promote such erroneous ideas do not work, and increase the likelihood both of depression and suicidal ideation and attempts.
- Grosvenor Park United Church seeks to ban conversion therapy in the city of Saskatoon and in our Province, Saskatchewan.

2. Why is this important?

- This is a crucial issue given the high rates of suicide and depression amongst those in the two spirit, LGBTQQIA+1 communities. This rate doubles when families try to convince their loved ones to be cisgender and/or heteronormative. This rate triples when the loved one has both family pressure, and Conversion therapy including pressure from a religious community (priest/pastor etc).

3. How might Living Skies Regional Council respond to this issue?

- The Living Skies Regional Council was mandated in 2019 to begin the process of becoming an Affirming Region. The principles have to do with the nature of humanity, and sending a clear signal that the United Church of Canada in Living Skies Regional council does not endorse any kind of “so called” therapies to change one’s gender expression, gender identity and/or sexual orientation. God loves us all. We are called to reach out with this message.

We ask the Living Skies Regional Council to also agree to submit a formal request to our provincial governments to ban conversion therapies within Saskatchewan.

We ask that individual communities of faith 1) are encouraged to understand why conversion therapies are so detrimental to the health and well-being of so many of 1 Lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual our young folks; and 2) encouraged to write to the Province of Saskatchewan stating opposition to conversion therapies.

We ask that Living Skies Regional council encourage all Affirming and 2SGBTQIA+ supportive communities of faith to investigate local bylaws related to conversion therapy, and to become aware of the forms conversion therapy may take in their own communities.

Although we know that the federal government intends to take action regarding conversion therapies, it is crucial for the church as a national body to speak out publically, intentionally, and explicitly as an accepting spiritual body for our two spirit and LGBTQQIA+ members and friends, so that they feel heard, accepted and understood in the name of Jesus.

¹ Lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual

PROPOSAL NO 2

Title: **Removing or reducing the 20% extra regional assessment for 2021.**

Originating Body: **Living Skies Regional Council Executive**

1. What is the issue?

In 2019 the Living Skies Regional Council held its inaugural Regional Council meeting in Swift Current. During that meeting conversation focused on the ongoing financial support of the Regional Council's twelve [Community Ministries](#)* which had been receiving Mission Support Grants from the national church, and additional support from presbyteries and SK Conference. Decreasing Mission Support Grants and the financial and relational impact of the end of presbyteries raised concerns in the council about the longer term viability and sustainability of these ministries.

After much discussion it was decided that a 20% regional assessment **in addition to** the regular assessment would be collected in 2020 and 2021 only, with the funds dedicated to supporting community ministries. Please see this October 2019 [letter to all communities of faith](#) for details. The anticipated revenue for 2020 is \$110,000. Later discussion in the Executive and its Regional Assessment Task Group clarified that the goal of the assessment funds was to support strategies towards new or existing work that supports long term sustainability, and is not intended to go towards regular operating budgets of these ministries.

2. Why this issue is important:

Over the last year the Executive has received several letters from Communities of Faith indicating that the additional regional assessment was creating financial strain and that governing bodies were having to decide whether or not they were able to pay the Regional Assessment. Concerns were also raised around how the additional assessment was going to be used within the Region. These concerns were present even before the COVID pandemic created great financial strain for many Communities of Faith.

At the same time, the Regional Council is aware of the importance of each of these ministries to our life and ministry. Their ministry ensures a United Church presence, commitment, and witness in parts of the wider community where we might not otherwise have a presence. The impact of long-term declines in Mission Support Grants via Mission and Service givings, the loss of funding and (perhaps more importantly) relationships through presbyteries, and changes in social contexts in Saskatchewan, all add to the pressure facing community ministries. In both 2019 and 2020, the Executive took funds from its operating budget or funds from former presbyteries or Conference to make up the reduction in Mission Support Grants. However, this will not be a permanent option.

3. How the Regional Council might respond to this issue:

Hearing these concerns, and recognizing that the current global pandemic is causing unforeseen financial strain within communities of faith, the Living Skies Regional Council Executive makes the following proposals:

- To respond to community of faith needs in this time of crisis by removing or reducing the special 2021 regional assessment of 20%;
- The Regional Council will continue to support the Regional Council Community Ministries by using the 20% assessment funds collected in 2020 to help them find ways to be financially sustainable and vision new ways of carrying out their ministry. We acknowledge and affirm the importance of these ministries, and continue to seek ways to ensure their support.
- To respond to mission-supported ministries' needs by:

- Again inviting them to name their needs, this time through at least one online consultation and in ongoing conversations with groups of ministries;
- by continuing to promote their ministry, resources, action requests, and needs through Regional Council communication channels as requested.
- by assessing with them which needs are financial and which are related to other concerns, such as finding new volunteers, improving communications, building new relationships, adapting to changing contexts in Saskatchewan, etc;
- by connecting them to long-term sustainability resources in the EDGE Network and elsewhere, using the proceeds of the 2020 20% regional assessment to cover related costs.

Proposal:

That Living Skies Regional Council (LSRC) reduce the special regional assessment for 2021 to 0% and that instead, funding that is available from the 2020 assessment be directed to assisting community ministries within the regional council to explore and develop diverse ways of becoming more financially sustainable.

That LSRC encourage communities of faith to support at least one community ministry.

That the Executive and the Regional Assessment Task Group set up at least one meeting with the mission-grant supported ministries, and at least one meeting between them and the EDGE Network.

***Community Ministries:**

Northern Saskatchewan Hospital Chaplaincy
South Saskatchewan Hospital Chaplaincy
Ecumenical Chaplaincy at the University of Saskatchewan
Integrated Community Ministries (ICM), Saskatoon
Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry
Micah Mission
Parkland Restorative Justice
Camp Christopher (Christopher Lake)
Camp Shagabec (Cypress Hills Inter-Provincial Park)
Camp Tapawingo (Candle Lake)
Camp Woodboia (Wood Mountain Regional Park)
Lumsden Beach Camp (Last Mountain Lake)