

PROPOSAL NO. 1

Title: **RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS IN PALESTINE / ISRAEL**

Originating Body: Clergy Members from Saskatoon. I

1. What is the Issue?

A genocide is happening in Gaza, and we don't know how to stop it or even how to speak about it. Fear of being labeled “antisemitic” can inhibit criticism of the actions of the Israeli government. Canadians tend to know more about the suffering of the Jewish people historically than about Palestinians’ experience under Israeli occupation. This is not just a terrible event happening somewhere far away. It also impacts us closer to home. Palestinians are our neighbours in Saskatchewan, and they fear for the safety of their loved ones in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. United Church members have, with other observers, witnessed the violent treatment of peaceful protesters on the campus of the University of Calgary.

2. What is Happening now?

Yet, Jesus calls us to cry out for justice, to protest such violence and destruction. The United Church of Canada calls us to “deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice.” Throughout scripture, God requires the faithful to act for just peace. It took a global movement, including churches around the world, to end apartheid and settler colonialism in South Africa. It will take the same to end apartheid, occupation, and settler colonialism, and to establish a just peace in Israel-Palestine. The United Church has encouraged its members to respond in various ways (see Background Information, below). We propose that as the LSRC we educate and equip ourselves to speak responsibly, to pray, and to act.

3. How might the Regional Council or General Council respond to the issue?**1. *Develop Resources for Education and Discussion***

Assist Regional Council staff, members, and communities of faith in convening safe spaces for brave conversations and dialogue, by making available **educational resources compiled by the newly formed “Just Peace Palestine/Israel Cluster”** of the Living Skies Justice Team. Resources, from the United Church and other churches and organizations, might include study guides, speakers, webinars, and/or films on the following topics:

- a. **Explaining** the context of Israel’s current war on Gaza and the role of Hamas; and the history of Zionism, the Nakba, and the settler occupation of Palestine.
- b. **Clarifying** terms, e.g., anti-Judaism, anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinian racism, and Islamophobia, in order to help members constructively criticize the policy and actions of the government and state of Israel and of Palestinian governing bodies.
- c. **Providing links** to other cultural, religious, or activist organizations working in this area, e.g., Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME); Free Palestine; Independent Jewish Voices (IJV).

2. *Adopt Clear Policies within the Regional Council to:*

- a. **Grant high priority to providing the educational resources** named above, as part of the Church’s overall anti-racism initiatives and de-colonializing imperatives;
- b. **Provide regular and frequent updates** to local communities of faith via the LSRC Rambler, the LSRC Facebook page, and other means of communication about the unfolding situation and any actions taken by the United Church of Canada;
- c. **Encourage members to participate in groups and actions** (including cultural events, letter writing and petition campaigns) that work for an end to the genocidal violence and seek just solutions that will lead to lasting peace in Palestine/Israel.
- d. **Affirm, in its communications with the GCE and within the LSRC, including the Regional Rambler newsletter, support for the United Church’s calls to the Government of Canada for a permanent ceasefire, a two-way arms embargo, humanitarian aid, and a just and lasting peace in Palestine/Israel.**

3. Call upon the Government of Saskatchewan to:

- a. **Call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire** in Gaza and a negotiated settlement that recognizes the equality of all people living in Israel and Palestine and their right to live in peace and security, with full human rights under international law.
- b. **Apologize to the protestors** who peacefully attended the legislature on November 20, 2023, for the Saskatchewan Party's false accusations and mischaracterization of their actions as "rioting."

4. Background information

The United Church of Canada currently states the following on its website as its positions (as of May 17, 2024):

People in Gaza are experiencing utter destruction, loss of lives, and inhumane conditions without access to basic necessities for life. Famine is imminent. Children are particularly impacted. Our faith and our humanity call us to act now to ensure an end to the conflict. It will take all of our efforts to get the Government of Canada to do everything in its power to help bring an end to the conflict and to not be complicit in genocide and famine.

Please join us in action: advocate, join a pilgrimage, pray, and donate.

The United Church of Canada's Mission and Service partners are responding to those impacted by the conflict in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They will rapidly expand their activity into Gaza and provide aid when a safe humanitarian corridor opens.

The United Church is working with Mission and Service partners ACT Alliance and Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (opens in a new tab) (DSPR). As a member of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, we are also working with Foodgrains Bank partners on the ground to offer lifesaving support to Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and Gaza.

Pray for peace with justice for the people of Palestine and Israel. As people of faith, we bring the grief, compassion, and concerns of a hurting world to God.

The United Church of Canada urges the Government of Canada to do everything in its power to bring an end to the conflict and to not be complicit in genocide and famine. We need Canada to act on three fronts:

- First, a permanent ceasefire is essential to allow for safe delivery of critical humanitarian relief into Gaza—food, medicine, potable water—and also to create conditions for a just and lasting peace and basic human dignity in the region. So, we call on Canada to use all diplomatic channels and leverage points to secure an immediate and permanent ceasefire, and for Canada to implement a comprehensive and binding arms embargo.
- Second, humanitarian aid—including from The United Church of Canada Mission and Service partners—needs to reach those in need, urgently and abundantly. So, we call on Canada to use all diplomatic, political, and economic channels and leverage points to urge Israel to ensure safe passage of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Canada should also increase its aid envelope and help support refugees.
- Third, we must support building the conditions for a just and lasting peace—where safety, respect for rights, justice, and human dignity is safeguarded for all.
- So, we call on Canada to support international efforts to hold all parties accountable for violations of international law to make sure this situation never repeats itself, and to commit to long-term engagement in the region.

Canada has a legal and moral duty to do everything in its power to prevent acts of genocide and avoid complicity in any such acts, because it is a signatory to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

HOW DOES THIS PROPOSAL HELP US TO LIVE INTO OUR CHURCH'S COMMITMENTS ON EQUITY?

This proposal responds to the Strategic Plan of the United Church of Canada, which calls its members to “witness in love and justice to the liberating healing Christ risen in this place and time;” “to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship and daring justice;” “to have a common orientation towards work that is deep, bold, and daring;” and “to embolden justice: collaborating to mend church and world.”

Further, it enacts the seven principles developed to guide the Church’s justice work: anti-oppression, truth-telling, holistic scope, respect for human dignity, full participation and decolonization, equity mutuality and reparations, and costly and prophetic solidarity. The educational resources we propose will advance the church’s Anti-Racism initiatives and decolonializing imperatives as they help us to navigate the narratives of this devastating situation.

Respectfully submitted by:

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PROPOSAL NO. 2**Title: ANTI-POVERTY**

Originating Body:

1. What is the Issue?

We believe God calls us to love one another by supporting the health and well-being of our whole community, including those who are unhoused, live with addictions, and/or identify as Indigenous, disabled, and 2SLGBTQ+.

2. What is Happening now?

Government failure to provide adequate basic income supports, neglect of social housing, and cutbacks to social services are harming and even killing the most vulnerable in our province (sources cited in #4). As disciples of Jesus, we are called to witness and protest the damage caused by misguided government austerity.

3. How might the Regional Council or General Council respond to the issue?

The executive of the Living Skies Regional Council could write a letter to Premier Scott Moe, with copies to the Hon. Gene Makowsky, Minister of Social Services, and the Hon. Bronwyn Eyre, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, to insist that the Saskatchewan government create policies and provide adequate financial support that centre the needs of vulnerable people. The province could save money and lives by

- providing a guaranteed basic income for all,
- making the minimum wage a living wage,
- increasing funding to community-based solutions such as harm-reduction centres,
- and creating permanent solutions for housing and food insecurity.

4. Background information

- **Income Assistance:** Saskatchewan's two income support programs are appallingly inadequate. The poverty line for a single adult in Saskatchewan is approximately \$1,868 a month (Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry [RAPM]). The Saskatchewan Income Support Program (SIS) provides in Regina and Saskatoon \$1005 per month (\$50 less outside these cities) for all basic living expenses including rent and utilities, food, clothing, and transportation. The Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) grants, on average, \$1,350 per month. Neither amount meets the needs of recipients.

For those able to work, Saskatchewan boasts the lowest minimum wage in Canada. Full-time work at minimum wage does provides about \$2,200 per month, barely enough for a single person and insufficient to support a child or another adult (RAPM).

- **Housing:** In 2022 in Saskatchewan 1,158 people or 18% of the population experienced homelessness, which is 2% higher than the Canada-wide homelessness rate. One quarter of Saskatchewan's unhoused people (25%) are youth under 24 years and the vast majority, 90%, identified as Indigenous. In Canada, 45% of people experiencing homelessness are disabled; Saskatchewan does not track this statistic.

Emergency solutions at best, shelters are inadequate, accommodating less than one third of the reported number of unhoused people. For example, the province's three largest cities have a total of 12 shelters with beds for only 335. (<https://www.homelesshub.ca/CommunityProfiles>).

As the cost of housing rises and the province's social housing deteriorates from lack of maintenance because of budget cuts, the unhoused population continues to increase. Elders such as 50-year old "Stella" in Saskatoon are forced to couch surf while one- and two-bedroom apartments accommodate up to fourteen adults in unsafe conditions (Integrated Community Ministries [ICM]).

- **Addictions:** In 2023, the province witnessed 484 confirmed and suspected drug toxicity deaths. In the first three months of 2024, the Saskatchewan Coroner's Service confirmed "26 people died of drug toxicity . . . with another 87 deaths suspected to be from the same cause" (April 4 2024. Laura Sciarpetti, CBC Saskatchewan. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/sask-coroners-service-reports-113-confirmed-and-suspected-drug-toxicity-deaths-between-january-and-march-1.7163391>).

Amid this crisis, one community-based solution in Saskatoon, Prairie Harm Reduction, has seen its funding decrease to the point that they are forced to end services every day at 4:00 pm instead of 10:00 pm. When people cannot test their drugs, they end up being treated for toxicity in alleyways if they are found before they die (Sciarpetti and ICM).

- **Food Insecurity:** Nearly one fifth (20%) of Saskatchewan families experienced food insecurity in 2023 (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2023060-eng.htm>). Nationally that puts this agricultural province at slightly higher than the median (at 20.5) of all Canadian provinces (territories not included in data). Most, if not all, people living below the poverty line must choose between food and rent every month.

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

The United Church is committed to daring justice and bold discipleship. This proposal witnesses that certain populations are disproportionately disadvantaged by cuts to social services: those who are racialized, those who are disabled or neurodivergent, those who live with insufficient resources, and those who live with addictions. To foster equity for all people living in Saskatchewan, the regional council could write a strongly worded letter to the Saskatchewan government urging a just distribution of the province's wealth through such measures as

- a guaranteed basic income for all,
- a substantial rise to the minimum wage,
- increased funding for harm-reduction centres,
- and permanent solutions for housing and food insecurity.

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PROPOSAL NO. 3

Title: **GROWTH PRIORITY**

Originating Body: St. Paul's United Church, Saskatoon

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

We believe that God has gifted congregations to the world, and God desires congregations to be healthy and growing. Congregations are the principal place wherein people grow in faith, they are the first place to attract new people to follow Jesus Christ, and they are a primary place for the formation of Jesus' followers into bold discipleship, deep spirituality, and daring justice.

The Living Skies regional council has a role to play in supporting congregational health and growth.

2. What is Happening now?

Our regional council does an incredible job supporting congregations and enabling regional ministry. This includes work supporting congregations through property and pastoral relations matters, supporting justice through many initiatives and the justice team, supporting youth and young adult ministry, and more.

The general council's strategic plan has named growth as the top priority for the denomination. Growth is understood in a nuanced and multi-faceted way

3. How might the Regional Council or General Council respond to the issue?

The Living Skies regional council could:

- Identify congregational health and growth as the top priority for the regional council
- Review programming and resources so as to align to that priority
- Consult with communities of faith, ministry personnel, and lay leaders, about what supports and training could assist them in experiencing growth, undertaking evangelism, and strengthening invitation

Or,

- Given the importance of other matters, articulate that something other than congregational health and growth should be the top priority of the regional council

4. Background information

This proposal emerged out of the Saskatoon and area cluster's conversation on congregational health and growth, where congregations explored together how we could support one another towards congregational health and growth.

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

Congregational growth generally requires reaching people in our communities who are younger and more diverse than our current congregations. Those congregations who are experiencing growth in our regional council often do so by serving and blessing members of queer, trans, and Two Spirit communities, communities of colour, Indigenous communities, disabled people, and youth and young adults. Congregational growth is deeply connected with our commitments to equity.

PROPOSAL NO. 4

Title: CHURCH IMPROVEMENT GRANT

Originating Body: Mount Royal Emmanuel Church, Saskatoon

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

We believe that God has gifted us buildings to enable our mission and ministry, and so congregations steward those buildings. To assist congregations in stewarding their buildings for ministry, the church/manse modernization and improvement grant supports modest resource congregations.

With the increasing costs of stewarding buildings, otherwise healthy and vibrant congregations can experience challenges in balancing stewardship of buildings which are used for their own purposes and for community benefit, with the resources for their own mission and ministry. With inflation in building renewal costs, the church/manse modernization and improvement grant may not be reaching the program objectives.

2. What is happening now?

The current church/manse modernization and improvement grant states:

EXISTING SCOPE AND POLICY:

Each congregation of a pastoral charge can apply for a matching grant of up to \$5,000 (minimum is \$500). A grant may be provided to a congregation on a dollar for dollar matching basis within any six year period for pastoral charges with an annual income of up to \$150,000 and unrestricted reserve funds of less than \$37,500.

3. How might the Regional Council or General Council respond to the issue?

The general council could:

- Review the church/manse modernization and improvement grant to increase the matching grant to \$10,000 or another amount better able to meet the needs of congregations
- Review the church/manse modernization and improvement grant to allow more frequent use, such as every five years, or another period better able to meet the needs of congregations

Or,

- Affirm that the existing policy is sufficient to meet the needs of congregations

4. Background information

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

The church/manse modernization and improvement grant exists to support congregations with modest resources, many of whom are in smaller communities or those otherwise experiencing economic disadvantage.

PROPOSAL NO. 5**Title: CONGREGATIONAL GOVERNANCE**

Originating Body: St. Paul's United Church, Saskatoon

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

We believe that God has gifted congregations to the world, and God desires congregations to be healthy and growing. Congregations are the principal place wherein people grow in faith, they are the first place to attract new people to follow Jesus Christ, and they are a primary place for the formation of Jesus' followers into bold discipleship, deep spirituality, and daring justice.

The Manual and other United Church governing documents place requirements on the governance of congregation that may not always fit. For example:

- Congregations are required to have a chair, a secretary, and a treasurer
- Congregations are required to have a ministry and personnel committee
- Congregations are required to have a board of trustees separate from their governing body

At the same time, research finds that the more decision-making bodies a congregation has and the larger those are, the less likely a congregation is to be healthy and growing (see for example research by The Unstuck Group: <https://theunstuckgroup.com/effective-church-boards/>). While the remaining governance requirements in the Manual and other governing documents may make sense for some congregations, for others they may restrict the ability of congregations to respond missionally to their context. With the urgency of the need for change in many congregations to achieve health and growth, congregations should be further freed to adopt governance models that make sense for their local contexts, in discernment and collaboration and with and under the oversight of their regional councils.

In particular, the role of treasurer is particularly challenging to fill. Many congregations, especially smaller ones, may experience the succession planning for treasurer as a particular challenge, and volunteers serving as treasurer experience particular stress.

2. What is Happening now?

Section B.7 of the Manual in particular articulates the governance requirements for congregations, although other parts of the Manual and handbooks and guidelines could also be reviewed so as to enable more nimble governance for congregations.

Beginning during the pandemic and continuing, the general council provides meaningful and regular support to congregational treasurers. This may be a model for other aspects of congregational governance, such as ministry and personnel committees, that also experience challenges.

3. How might the Regional Council or General Council respond to the issue?

The general council could:

- Review the remaining governance requirements in the Manual and other governing documents for congregations to eliminate all that are possible so as to free congregations to adopt governance models that are best fit for their missional context
- Consult with congregations that are experiencing health and growth to identify how governance can enable or prevent congregational health and growth
- Prepare resources for congregations in selected or adapting their governance models that include research and best practice
- Continue to provide support to congregational treasurers

- Explore supports to other congregational governance roles, such as ministry and personnel committees, inspired by the work supporting congregational treasurers

Or,

Affirm that the existing governance requirements in the Manual are reasonable

4. Background information

This proposal emerged out of the Saskatoon and area cluster's conversation on congregational health and growth, where congregations of many sizes identified governance-related challenges as a risk to their health and growth.

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

While demographic data on congregational volunteers does not exist or is not available to the authors of the proposal, the volunteers serving on the governing bodies and in governance roles of congregations are likely to be disproportionately older and likely to be predominantly women. Healthy ways of living together will provide a positive and inclusive volunteer experience for congregational volunteers.

PROPOSAL NO. 6

Title: Review Questions Required by The Manual of Candidates at the Time of Ordination, Commission or Recognition.

Originating Body: Council, St. James United Church, Regina

1. What is the Issue?

The required question for all candidates For Commissioning, Ordination, Recognition and Admission, “Do you believe in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and do you commit yourself anew to God?” (The Manual 2024m III. 13.3.1) was not changed to accommodate more current faith statements that were added to the Doctrine Section of the Basis of Union in 2009.

2. What is Happening now?

The question asked of all candidates reflects the Doctrine of The United Church at the time of Union and the Twenty Articles of Faith.

3. How might the Regional Council or General Council respond to the issue?

1. Region could ask Denominational Council to develop a policy to allow wider interpretations of the trinity such as was done in the Decade in Solidarity with Women, and issue a remit to change section III of The Manual.
2. Region could request that Denominational Council to conduct a church-wide study of at least a year to determine questions that would include more current theological understandings within The United Church of Canada. Should it result in passing a new proposal, issue a remit to change The Manual.
3. Do nothing.

4. Background information

The Trinity found in the 1925 Articles of Union- “God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit” as all in one - came to this form 400 years after the death of Jesus. In the early years after his death Christian theologians were looking at the interrelationships of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Jewish tradition of Jesus was monotheistic – only one God, so how was Jesus, seen as having godlike qualities, fit into monotheism.

Tertullian (155-200 CE) was the first to use the word “trinity” (from the Latin *trinus*, meaning “threefold”) but it was not God in One. He described it as a “divine economy” as in the household or monarchy of God. God the Father laid out the divine plan, God the Son carried out the will of the Father, and God the Spirit motivated the will of God in believers. *“Tertullian’s trinity—not a triune God, but rather a triad or group of three, with God as the founding member.”*

By the early 300s the Christian theologians were fracturing into two different groups with divergent views of the relationship of Jesus to God. One view put forward by the Priest Arius and his followers was that Jesus was not divine but a created being. A second view put forward by Bishop Athanasius and his followers was that the Father and Son were of the same substance or essence.

In 325 CE fearing that the conflict amongst the Christian groups was threatening the stability of the Roman Empire, Emperor Constantine 1 called together a council of Bishops – the First Council of Nicaea to resolve the issue. A majority of the bishops sided with Trinitarian approach and “... *decreed that the Father and Son were homoousios (same substance or essence). Arius and his party were*

excommunicated” and persecuted. The degree became known as the Creed of Nicaea. But the controversy continued, and the Holy Spirit had not yet been linked to a “trinity”.

In 381 at the Council of Bishops at Constantinople further clarifications were made with *“homoousios ... understood as asserting the Father and Son to not merely be similar beings, but in some sense one being. While it stopped short of saying that the Holy Spirit was homoousios with the Father and Son, the council did say that the Holy Spirit “is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son”, and added in a letter accompanying their creed that the three share “a single Godhead and power and substance” ...*The followers of *Athanasius and others* (continued to argue) *that the salvation of humans requires the Son and Holy Spirit to be equally divine with the Father. The Holy Spirit would come to be included. These clarifications led to what is known as the Nicene Creed and a basis for the 1925 Articles of Union statement on God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.*

There would be later creeds written based on the Holy Trinity one of them being in the 6th Century I the “Athanasian Creed” written by an unknown author.

The Holy Trinity was a means by humans to explain God and the relation of Jesus to/with God and the Holy Spirit. The Three in One – Holy Trinity, since being proclaimed, has seen continued discussions as humans continue to grapple with the meaning and importance of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Sources: [The History of Trinitarian Doctrines](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trinity/trinity-history.html#Intro) From the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Encyclopedia Britannica

From the above we see that the concept of the trinity as identified in the Basis of Union was not an original part of the early Christian Church. Nor was there unanimous agreement among parts of Christianity. It was a part of the development of Christianity and was not always considered essential.

Within The United Church of Canada, it may have been essential as long as the Doctrine Section contained only The Twenty Articles of Faith. Yet other interpretations were accepted between 1988 and 1998 and many ministers recognised then may still be active today.

In 2009, the Song of Faith was among the documents added to the Doctrine Section of the Basis of Union as statements appropriate to their time. It includes “With the Church through the ages, we speak of God as one and triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Affirming those who adhere to that formula. A strength of the Song of Faith is that it includes a variety of understandings of God, Jesus and Spirit. For example, “We also speak of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer God, Christ, and Spirit Mother, Friend, and Comforter Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love, and in other ways that speak faithfully of the One on whom our hearts rely, the fully shared life at the heart of the universe. We witness to Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.”

“We sing of Jesus, a Jew, born to a woman in poverty in a time of social upheaval and political oppression. He knew human joy and sorrow. So filled with the Holy Spirit was he that in him people experienced the presence of God among them.”

Candidates whose understandings are closer to these, are not affirmed in the same way. Such persons may be discouraged from seeing candidature or even be turned away from the church entirely.

Recommendation:

St. James United Church Council recommends that the Denominational Council conducts a church—wide study of at least a year to determine questions for Commissioning, Ordination, Recognition and Admission that would include more current theological understandings within The United Church of Canada. In the event that the study indicates a change in the vows is needed, a remit to change the questions in The Manual (2024 III. 13.3.1) be issued.