

The remit process is now over, passing nationally with 80% of pastoral charges giving their approval. Before the results were announced the Right Relations and Social Justice Minister (Thérèse Samuel) and the Social Justice Minister (John Egger) for the Regional Councils prepared the following report that offers our observations and reflections on the process. The remit was a significant focus for us this past year, and provided us with much contact with individuals and pastoral charges, stretching far beyond the remit itself. We would like to share a bit about what we learned in the process and our reflections on the racism and colonialism that was encountered in the conversations and our thoughts about future directions for this work in right relations and the broader work of anti-oppression and intercultural ministries.

In July of 2022, when the remit was authorized, Thérèse thought, “I know what my next year is going to be focussed on.” But didn’t know how true that would turn out to be.

When the remit question came out in March of 2023, Thérèse provided a presentation to the Discipleship and Justice Commissions (D&J) of ARW, HF and WOW, and all three expressed a commitment to supporting the remit discussion. Thérèse then worked with the Executive Minister (EM) to provide education and question and answer sessions at each of the RC Spring Meetings. Cathy Hird, a WOW Discipleship and Justice Commission (D&J) member, came forward and expressed a desire to encourage the pastoral charges to engage the discussion and vote. In the summer of 2023, the EM assigned John to work with Thérèse in the remit process. Thérèse and John met with Cathy to plan what would become the Remit Reach-Out.

During the next few months, as the remit project moved into high gear, John and Thérèse continued to provide leadership in promoting the remit, while receiving support and guidance from the EM (first Cheryl-Ann, then Mark, then Cheryl-Ann, then Mark again), as well as assistance from other tri-RC staff when needed. We supported Cathy throughout the reach-out process, and worked as a team to provide educational seminars and resources for pastoral charges, to respond to questions about the remit, and to support governing bodies in discussing the remit. For both John and Thérèse, the majority of our work until the end of March was devoted to the remit in one way or another. It took us both a while to realize how much time and energy the remit discussion was going to take, and we also quickly realized that many of the benefits of this work were going to go beyond the remit itself.

We discovered very early on that there is much more to this than was at first apparent. Questions were complex. Some were simply seeking understanding about the remit and its implications, but stirring in the background there were numerous other dynamics, including:

- Troubled relationships with the wider church, polity and past remits, and dissatisfaction with the remit process itself
- Settler colonialism and racism that are embedded in our church and society and were the basis of what was historically known as “missions to the Indians”
- Concerns about the viability (financial and otherwise) of local congregations and the broader United Church
- Layers of grief and uncertainty as the church comes to terms with the harmful impacts of colonialism on Indigenous communities, and as many congregations deal with losses in their own contexts.

We also found that while the remit was about a specific set of changes to *The Manual*, it was also about the breadth of our relationships as Indigenous and Non-Indigenous in The United Church of Canada. These complexities often made it challenging to discern the concerns embedded in questions and to respond to them meaningfully.

We also began to realize that, whether or not the remit was to pass, there would be positive benefits of the remit discussion, including:

- As the church is learning to live into a structure which is still very new, the Remit Reach-Out engagement gave an opportunity for volunteers from across the regional councils to make contacts with leaders in almost all of the pastoral charges
- As the Discipleship and Justice Commissions continue to learn to live into their roles and mandates, through the Remit Reach-Out they have actively initiated contacts with congregations
- Governing bodies and congregations across our regional councils engaged in discussion on right relations in a way that likely would not otherwise have happened and in so doing engaged in relationship as an Indigenous and Non-Indigenous church in a new way
- People in Non-Indigenous congregations across the regional councils grew in their awareness of the Indigenous church within the United Church
- Connections were made between regional councils across the country as we shared and supported one another in our remit promotion activities; this collaboration continues with other portfolios
- John and Thérèse as staff are better equipped to support the regions in a broad range of justice and right relations ministries

Remit Project Components

Presentations:

- 3 RC D&J presentations (TS)
- 6 RC presentations (TS: 3 in team with the EM and 3 in team with JE)
- 4 public presentations (TS&JE: 3 hybrid, 1 online only)
- 1 Outreach Group (TS with Lee Claus)
- At least 4 online visits with PCs in fall and winter (TS&JE)

Resources Created:

- 1 video compilation including Revs. Maggie Dieter and Cathy Hird, and CCDC Martha Pedoniquotte, and a power-point presentation (TS)
- 1 Responses to Questions document (TS&JE with consultation of staff of GCO, IMJ and Indigenous OV)

Numerous consultations with other UCC staff, especially

- Sara Stratton (Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice Animator, Indigenous Ministries and Justice)
- Adele Halliday (Antiracism and Equity Lead, General Council)
- Alison Jordan (Law Clerk, General Council)
- Executive Minister

Remit Reach-Out:

- July- Aug Development of initial process in consultation with Kathy Douglas
 - o Worked with Cathy as she determined parameters of Reach-out
 - Confidentiality and scope of the role of contact people
 - Putting in place RC Team Leaders from the D&J Commissions
 - Planning orientation for callers
 - o Accessing and compiling contact lists for 400 PCs in 3 RCs
- Sept Training for Callers
 - o Team with Cathy to lead orientation/training for callers
- Received lists of those who had not voted.

- Initially we had to ask GC for the lists, and by January GC automatically sent out the list every 2 weeks. These were relayed to Cathy.
- Available for follow-up,
 - questions or concerns that callers or team leaders had
 - questions relayed from callers

Receiving questions about or in response to Remit 1, consulting, researching and formulating responses, referring when appropriate, on varied topics including:

- Logistics of the remit—COF ID and M&S number, where to get ballots, etc.
- Questions directly relating to the remit question
- Questions related to Indigenous Ministries that were beyond the scope of the remit
- Questions, concerns and/or dissatisfaction with the remit process itself:
 - ties in with concerns about the previous remits
 - the polity governing remits—why abstentions are not permitted, why changes cannot be made to the question itself, etc.
- Clarifying and responding to questions related to polity and procedures in specific situations:
 - about amalgamating and disbanding PC votes
 - Reconsidering a previously registered vote

Broader work:

- Consulting with GCO and IMJ staff in our communication materials and responses to questions
- Receiving referrals of questions/concerns from GCO and IMJ staff to follow up on some of the more complex questions from PCs in our RCs
- Meetings with GCO, and RC staff in other regions
- Working with Michele and Pretima on communications in Website, Newsletters and social media

Reflections

Remit 1 was asking the wider church to allow the Indigenous church to self-determine its internal organizational structure and procedures within The United Church of Canada, and to authorize changes to *The Manual* that would allow that. But there were assumptions underlying that question that brought specific challenges to many people in congregations.

The remit was not asking for a new structure that would require new funding—the funding and mechanisms for funding the Indigenous church, as well as processes for reviewing how funding is allocated, are already in place and not under question in the remit. It also relied on the wider church trusting the General Council and Indigenous leaders in the church to continue to negotiate that funding. The remit was not asking the church to endorse the *Caretakers' Calls to the Church*—not officially. That was already endorsed by General Council in 2018, and the remit relied on the *Caretakers' Calls* as a foundational document. But for many in pastoral charges *The Calls to the Church* was a new document, and to consider the remit required understanding and endorsement of *The Calls to the Church*. The remit was on the surface about specific and limited changes to *The Manual*, but on a deeper level it was about entering into relationship in a new way as an Indigenous and Non-Indigenous church.

On the surface, it was a simple and straightforward question. But we gradually realized that for many in the church it was asking something more, something unspoken, something they couldn't quite put their finger on. In recent years there has been much movement happening in Indigenous Ministries and Justice and the NIC and in the evolving relationship between IMJ, NIC and the General Council that most people in congregations are not aware of. The remit directly addressed one specific part of that dynamic—internal organizational structure and procedures. In the beginning it seemed that many people did not understand what they were voting on when it came to the remit question. As we

engaged, it became apparent that the remit question and remit process itself did not acknowledge the work that individuals and congregations would be required to do in order to meaningfully discuss and vote on the remit. Most of our engagement on the remit was in addressing these matters that the remit was not directly asking, but that were foundational to the remit question and the remit process itself. And these matters are foundational to our commitments to right relations as Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples, and our commitments to trust in God, grow in faith together as disciples of Christ, and to allow the Spirit to work in us and one another.

The irony of the Remit 1 process was that it required the church to follow a settler colonial remit process to loosen our hold on that same settler colonial remit process. It was, in a sense, a remit about remits and as such it drew the church's focus to the remit process in a way that no other remit has (at least, that we are aware of). On the surface it was a simple matter of business and of justice. But deeper down it was asking the church to learn and grow and engage very deeply in a short period of time. Across the tri-regions of ARW, HF and WOW, pastoral charges and individuals took up the challenge and lived into our shared faith. They engaged in what were often risky and difficult conversations in ways that surprised us, that challenged us and that inspired us. We come to the end of the remit process exhausted, but full of hope.

Thérèse's and John's further reflections include:

- On the surface, the remit was about a specific and limited change to our polity and institutional structure. But at its core, the remit was about relationship.
- Observations about underlying but unnamed racist and colonialist assumptions
- The impact of questions within the context of colonialism and racism
- Awareness that people were at vastly different places with the conversation.
- Our engagement in the remit-related dialogue had personal impacts on each of us
- The benefits and necessity of teaming in this work
- We felt it was important to offer the education as non-Indigenous people, and to not burden Indigenous leaders with doing this work for us.
- We noticed a difference between answering questions in a workshop (participants invited into a space where planned the process) and in a meeting of the pastoral charge governing body where we had been invited into their space to answer questions.

We noticed... we wonder...

- We noticed that sometimes people expressed opposition to the remit because of dissatisfaction with the process, and we also noticed that the remit was asking the church to loosen its grip on the remit process and to loosen its grip on the colonial power that is vested in the remit process. We wonder what the church would learn if we had some deep discussions about our polity and the remit process and made space to intentionally listen to all voices, especially the voices of people who feel dissatisfied, disregarded, or silenced by the process.
- We noticed that the remit question brought all kinds of people into the conversation. People with diverse experiences and perspectives entered into conversations in varying degrees—some engaged deeply, some less so.
We wonder, is that engagement a momentary thing? Now that the remit process has closed, is the engagement done and gone? Or will it lead to further engagement in the coming months and years?

Theological Reflection

As we prepare this report, the results of the remit have not yet been revealed. And we are reminded of Moses and the Israelites who journey together. The people may be of different minds and have different expectations. The journey is challenging, but whether the people are pleased or dissatisfied, the journey continues. As it was for Moses and the people, in many ways so, too, is it for us. Many of the changes that were debated in the discussions on the remit are changes that will happen whether the remit passes or not. The journey continues, whether we want it to or not. We have fears, but the journey continues. We are engaged in a project that is bigger than this moment. We are called to trust and be part of the bigger movement not just for ourselves, but for the generations to come. Very likely we, like Moses, will never quite make it to the promised land, but if we remain faithful on the path - not perfect, but faithful - we will find that God gives us a glimpse of it. And through it all, the important thing is that we are in relationship. Relationship with one another. Relationship with God. And even when we falter, even when our actions are not as grand as our intentions, God does not stop guiding us, forgiving us, loving us.

The Remit 1 conversation is over but, as we noted at the beginning, there will be many more conversations ahead. Let us continue to trust that wherever the future takes us, we are not alone. God is with us.

Thanks be to God.