

Remit I: Background and Resources for Delegates 2020 Northern Spirit Regional Council Annual Meeting

Remit I 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 I 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: 10.0: 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:

Proposed wording: **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 the Jewish scriptures](#). 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 I 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/A4lBibGzUnE>

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.