

Remit Learning Circle #1

November 23, 2023

Leadership: Elders and Knowledge keepers Charlene and Russel Burns; Shannon McCarthy, Executive Minister for Northern Spirit, Living Skies and Prairie to Pine Regional Councils; Julie Graham, Regional Minister for Justice and Communication. Tech team: Bev Diebert, Adam Hall, Therese Samuel

Russel opened with a smudge; Charlene offered prayer in her language (paskwawi nêhiyawêwin) and English. Please see the video of the meeting for Charlene and Russel's presentations.

History: Russ shared overall history and personal memories of consultations with Indigenous communities, done several years ago; and of conversations with elders

The 42nd General Council 2015 approved, subject to remit, a new three-council model for the United Church. The 42nd General Council 2015 authorized this Category 3 remit to presbyteries and pastoral charges to test the will of the church with respect to this new model. That remit was passed and on January 1, 2019, the implementation of the new structures and processes started. At that time, the Indigenous Church was not ready to move into their new structure, even as the restructuring ended existing Indigenous structures like the All Native Circle Conference. But now they are.

Autonomous

"An Indigenous voice to their own affairs". This is not a prelude to separating.

<https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/dreaming-new-relationships-indigenous-church.pdf>

Questions:

What is the budget? Shannon responded, that it is likely around \$4000,000, similar to the Regional Councils. There was clarification around a comment about M&S, from which ministers in First Nation Churches are paid.

I would be interested in Maritime / Atlantic province reps on the Aboriginal Steering Committee. Russel Burns said they had been to Labrador looking for an Inuit rep.

Charlene Burns spoke on the issue of self-identity. In the United Church we don't ask people to identify themselves this way, so ministers may not even know (or may assume) they have Indigenous people in their congregation.

The locations of where the Steering Committee (in 2008) went. Russel Burns explained that they went to communities that had residential schools, among others.

The remit seems to disconnect the Indigenous Church from the United Church. Shannon explained that they will be separate, but together, similar to the way Pastoral Charges are separate from Regional Councils, and Regional Councils are separate from the Denominational Council (General Council), but they are all part of the United Church. The person spoke of a different diagram she had seen that showed what Shannon was saying. This drawing represented earlier conversations with elders on what the Indigenous church could look like. You can see it here; it is not formally a part of the current Remit materials. <https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/dreaming-new-relationships-indigenous-church.pdf>

My understanding of autonomy means separate. How will they work together? Shannon responded by sharing about her last weekend, when the General Council and the Executive leadership each met separately and together for both work and socializing. Lots of talking and sharing happened. Did everything get decided, no. But the conversation will continue.

Russel Burns replied that for First Nations peoples, autonomy is taking away the feeling / legacy of the Indian act; to act with self-determine their future. He defined self-determination as 'the opportunity to choose for ourselves what is best for us'. Julie Graham suggested folks look at the resources that are posted on each Regional Council's website. She recommended the video of Cadmus Delorme likening this to two canoes on a river.

Sharing Our Stories Indigenous Identity in the Christian Church:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejwjCjSNqhs>

Indigenous Peoples Speak to the Remit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhiQZWcfZzw>

This ended the official time for the learning circle. Attendees were invited to stay on the call if they had more questions. About 60 stayed on.

A participant felt like the video on the National website (Frequently asked Questions) charged feelings rather than alleviate them.

Clarification on what Shannon said about autonomy for the Regional Councils: Shannon explained that the United Church has many polices but not many of them affect the Regional Councils or the Communities of Faith. She gave examples: many years ago the national church had an anti-gambling policy. But each Conference and Pastoral Charge had to make their own decision / policy. Same with Gay (same-sex) Marriages: the national churches approved of this, but each pastoral charge was encouraged to create their own policy.

How do the [Calls to the Church](#) relate to this remit? Shannon explained they are directly related. The Calls are asking us to live into equal relationship and that is what this is doing. Autonomy over finances, and decision making. <https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/being-community/indigenous-ministries/calls-church>

A copy of the notes was requested- she will try to take this back to her congregation (Robertson-Wesley in Edmonton). Russel invited her to another learning event like this to be held in Edmonton.

Someone made a presentation to his church on Sunday and heard nothing but positive comments. When the remit was voted on by their Council, it was passed unanimously.

This Remit is a good plan; to work it out together. The participants quoted 2 Corinthians 5:6-7 (6)Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. (7) We live by faith, not by sight. (NIV)

It was noted that autonomy was a scary word and self determination is a better description.

This remit is a big part of reconciliation. Let's just move ahead.

Links to each Regional Council's page for more information on the Remit:

Living Skies:

<https://livingskiesrc.ca/more-information-remit-on-autonomous-indigenous-organization/>

Northern Spirit:

<https://northernspiritrc.ca/more-information-remit-on-autonomous-indigenous-organization/>

Prairie to Pine:

<https://prairietopinerc.ca/more-information-remit-on-autonomous-indigenous-organization/>