

ASSEMBLY COUNCIL**PURPOSE**

The Assembly Council is a servant of the church. In its role as both a coordinating body and a prophetic one, the Assembly Council is responsible for ensuring that the work of the church is carried out efficiently and effectively within the policies established by the General Assembly.

The Assembly Council coordinates the work of the national agencies of the church, having direct links with national staff and responsibility for the policies of the national office. It has final responsibility for financial matters under the authority of the General Assembly and recommends policy direction for the church to the Assembly. It is also called upon to present a vision for the mission of a church. It is also to affirm the work of the agencies of the church as they carry out a prophetic role for our denomination.

REPORT SUMMARY

This report is introduced with a report by the convener, Robert Smith, on the work of the Assembly Council through the past year. Much of the work of the Assembly Council is based on the strategic plan adopted in 2016. This is expected to increase in the future. Highlights of the work of each of the Assembly Council committees are given (Archives and Records, Benevolence, Church Architecture, Executive, Management Team and the Human Resources Committee). As is the case each year, this report also looks back at the financial results for The Presbyterian Church in Canada and looks forward to how we will carry on our mission through the 2019 budget.

Several matters were referred to the Assembly Council by past Assemblies. Responses for consideration can be found related to a fair stipend for summer students, arrangements for the General Assembly and ongoing work on housing benefits for lay ministry staff.

An update of our ongoing commitment to the Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and our ecumenical work with Indigenous partner organizations and the Government of Canada is given.

The Assembly Council also has reports on exploring alternate decision-making processes based on building consensus in groups and how they might benefit the church.

RECOMMENDATIONS**Microfilming/Digitizing Important Church Records (p. 80)**

The Archives staff continue to encourage congregations to microfilm and/or digitize their session minutes and church registers. A focus for this year was approaching selected historic congregations across the country that have not yet copied their records in any format and asking them to do so.

Recommendation No. 1

That all church courts be encouraged to have their official records (especially session minutes and church registers) copied to microfilm for security and preservation purposes, and also digitized if desired, by contacting the Archives.

Financial Results for 2017 (p. 84–86)

Thanks to the generous contributions to Presbyterians Sharing from congregations, individuals and groups across the church, the denomination is able to carry on mission and ministry throughout Canada and around the world. It is important that we acknowledge and give gratitude for their continued generosity and support.

The Finance Committee of the Assembly Council oversees the operating budget as well as the stewardship of Restricted Funds and Endowment Funds of the church. Each spring the Assembly Council reviews in detail, approves the audited financial statements and then presents them for information to the General Assembly.

Total revenue for 2017 was \$7.2 million, down by only \$100,000 when compared to 2016. Individuals giving to Presbyterians Sharing increased by \$16,500 over the previous year.

Total expenditures for 2017 were \$8,369,278, which was \$874,956 lower than budgeted and \$280,291 lower than last year's. The difference between revenue and expenditures is balanced through the careful and sustainable use of financial reserves held by the church.

The Pension Fund statements are also reviewed by the Assembly Council and favourable results were found to be well presented.

Recommendation No. 2

That the financial statements for The Presbyterian Church in Canada at December 31, 2017, be received for information. (p. 410–27)

Recommendation No. 3

That the financial statements for The Presbyterian Church in Canada Pension Fund at December 31, 2017, be received for information. (p. 428–50)

2019 Budget (p. 86–87)

The 2019 budget, compared to the 2018, reflects a decrease of 1.4% or \$126,751. Life and Mission Agency will reprioritize their spending. Support Services will require an increase of \$50,500 due to increases in insurance premiums and other fees. Careful spending and a transfer of monies from internally Restricted Funds of the church enable the budget to be balanced.

Recommendation No. 4

That the 2019 budget be approved. (p. 94)

Three Year Forecast 2020–2022 (p. 87)

Each year the Assembly Council also provides a three year financial forecast to the Assembly for information. The forecast shows revenues lined up with a level of expenditures and transfers from Restricted Funds that are sustainable over a three to five-year period.

Recommendation No. 5

That the 2020 to 2022 forecast be received for information.

Overture No. 8. 2017 re housing allowance benefit for non-ordained church workers (p. 88)

The Assembly Council discussed a draft response to an overture on this topic. Following those discussions it was agreed that more work is required and the matter was referred to the Human Resources Committee (previously Personnel Policy Committee) for further consideration.

Recommendation No. 6

That permission be granted for report on Overture No. 8, 2017 to the 2019 General Assembly.

Overture No. 13, 2018 re summer students stipend and accommodation (p. 88–89)

The framers the overture on this subject rightly point out that the stipend for summer student appointments has not been adjusted since 2001. The rate of pay stands at \$405 per week, or \$305 per week if housing is included.

Separate from summer stipends, Canadian Ministries supports a Rural and Remote Ministry Grant program which is popular among candidates for ministry. Under the terms of the grant, congregations pay the student according to the stipend and allowance schedule adopted by the General Assembly. At the end of the summer a grant of \$5,000 is provided to the congregation by Canadian Ministries with the stipulation that the congregation pass the grant on to the student to put towards their tuition and other costs for the coming year.

The Assembly Council is committed to the principle of meeting or exceeding provincial employment standards and, therefore, the following adjustment to the stipend for students on summer appointment is recommended.

Recommendation No. 7

That the stipend for students on summer appointment meet or exceed the minimum wage requirements for the province in which the appointment takes place; housing costs may be shared with the student, at a rate not to exceed \$100 per week, plus travel, as applicable.

Recommendation No. 8

That the Assembly Council review the stipend for students on summer appointment at least every five years.

Recommendation No. 9

That the above be the answer to Overture No. 13, 2017 re summer students stipend and accommodation.

Petition Nos. 1 and 3, 2017 re guidance re denominational unity during sexuality discussions (p. 89–91)

Petitions from the two Han-Ca Presbyteries were received asking for “guidance as to how we can remain as one body in the denomination, remaining as your courts of presbyteries serving its constituent members” during the current sexuality discussions.

The Assembly Council engaged the services of a consultant and held a one-day workshop with representatives of both presbyteries and three agencies of the church.

Together the group that gathered agreed to commend the following proposals to the church:

That the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada commit to unity as a precondition to decisions related to the issues of human sexuality.

That the General Assembly apply the biblical and historical principles of forbearance to one another and, if necessary, that the Committee on Church Doctrine articulate these principles to the church.

That, if necessary to preserve the unity of the church, the possibilities of a local option be explored.

That, if necessary, the question of whether this issue is an “essential of the faith” be explored; this follows the principle of the Reformer, Rupertus Meldenius, to whom is attributed the phrase “In Essentials unity, in Non-Essentials liberty, in all things Charity.”

The Assembly Council endorsed the results of the workshop as an appropriate response to the consultation requested by the petitions and also expresses its hope that the positive experience listening to one another and working together even in the presence of widely divergent views can be encouraged broadly in the church and within the work of the General Assembly on issues of sexuality. To that end, the Assembly Council makes the following recommendation:

Recommendation No. 10

That we as a church seek unity in Christ in our dealings with one another, in the spirit of the experience of the workshop engaged in by representatives of the Han-Ca Presbyteries, the Committee on Church Doctrine, the Life and Mission Agency, the Assembly Council and the Clerks of Assembly.

Recommendation No. 11

That the above actions and report be the answer to Petition Nos. 1 and 3, 2017 re guidance re denominational unity during human sexuality discussions.

Overture No. 1, 2018 re General Assembly arrangements (p. 91)

An overture on this subject asks that the Assembly Council and the General Assembly Office ensure the provision of adequate breaks in the flow of the General Assembly for commissioners, the Clerks of Assembly and the Moderator. It also asks that consideration be given to ensure sleeping accommodations, meals and meetings can be in close proximity. This is in the context of a shorter General Assembly (Sunday through Wednesday) which tends to necessitate longer days of business. The Assembly Council has appointed a General Assembly Design Team to assist both the Council and the General Assembly Office in shaping all aspects of the General Assembly. The design team has reviewed this overture and is very much aware of the need to provide a balance of prayerful work, worship, breaks, fellowship and rest during the General Assembly. Some changes to this end are being introduced at this Assembly. In addition to this, the Assembly Council has agreed to add one day to the Assembly starting in 2019.

Recommendation No. 12

That the prayer of Overture No. 1, 2018 re General Assembly arrangements be answered in terms of the above report.