

ASSEMBLY COUNCIL

To the Venerable, the 149th General Assembly:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you”. After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”
John 20:19–22

Stories, narratives, they shape and define the identity of organizations and stories define our identity as the people of God and as The Presbyterian Church in Canada. What are the stories we tell as a church, what are the narratives that shape our identity as The Presbyterian Church in Canada as we approach our 150th anniversary as a denomination? The Assembly Council has both a coordinating and prophetic role within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The Assembly Council has continued in its exploration of that prophetic role, even as it fulfills its coordinating function with regards to the decisions of the General Assembly and the work of its committees. In that prophetic role, the Council recognizes that the stories that are often told about The Presbyterian Church in Canada today are challenging ones, stories of decline, disappointment, disagreements and stories of fear, scarcity and even death.

But these are contextual stories, narratives that may be applicable for our immediate reality but they are not the foundational or fundamental stories that must shape and define our identity. That narrative finds its focus in the story of the resurrected Christ and defines the church as an Easter people. Our foundational narrative is the story of God’s love for creation, for humanity, for us, made known in the loving gift of incarnation, in the sacrificial story of agape love on the cross and in the story of the victory of life over death, the light that shines in the darkness, the resurrection of Jesus which brings redemption, forgiveness, restoration and peace.

The Assembly Council affirms that the narrative of The Presbyterian Church in Canada is one that must be rooted in that foundational story of God’s love, forgiveness and peace. As an Easter people, we find our identity as those who are set free by the redemptive gift of Christ, baptized in hope and possibility. We recognize that this narrative, these stories, are the ones that must be told again and again, especially in times of uncertainty and worry, that we do well in being reminded of our identity in Christ.

The Council usually meets twice a year in person, in late March and November at the Crieff Hills Community and may meet as required through online platforms. At our March 2024 meeting we were pleased to hear from the Moderator of Assembly, the Rev. Mary Fontaine and hear from her about her year to date as Moderator. The Council expresses its gratitude to the members of the national church Management Team and to the staff at the national office who so faithfully and skillfully support the work and witness of the Assembly Council.

We also express our deep appreciation to those who serve on the Council for the gifts they bring, gifts of wisdom, faith, diversity and discernment. For their willingness to embrace the prophetic role of the Council and for their openness to new possibilities through the Spirit, we give thanks to God. May the stories we continue to tell and may the narratives that lie at the root of our identity, always affirm that we are God’s people and the beloved of Christ.

NARRATIVES OF HOPE AND POSSIBILITY

Following on the commitment of the Assembly Council to its prophetic role, the Council agreed to create a working group to explore “Narratives of Hope and Possibility,” formalizing a process which the Council had been intentionally exploring for the past year.

Beginning in the autumn of 2022, the Assembly Council has engaged in thoughtful consideration and exploration of what its prophetic role may be at this time and how God’s Spirit may be guiding The Presbyterian Church in Canada through the narratives that shape our story and ministry. In effect, the narrative is the manger in which Christ is laid. This image affirms that at the heart of the church’s narrative is the person of Jesus Christ. At the 2023 General Assembly, commissioners participated in times of conversation called Narratives of Hope and Possibility, including stories we tell about ourselves and how our structures serve our stories. Building on the feedback received from the General Assembly, the Assembly Council appointed a working group to consider Narratives of Hope and Possibility. The Working Group consists of up to 20 members drawn from across the denomination, from a diversity of cultures and ministries. The working group consists of the following members: Jean Morris (convener), Candace Bahadoor,

Martin Baxter, Matt Brough, Brenda Butler, Jennifer Cameron, Jeffrey Crawford, Mavis Currie, Andrew Johnston, Paul Kang, Victor Kim, Bethany McCaffrey, Simon Park, Nick Renoud, Peter Rombeek, Glen Soderholme, Angie Song, Cindy Stephenson and Richard Topping. Ainsley Chapman, Executive Director of Evangel Hall Mission will consult with the group around the pathway of pivoting properties toward missional purposes. The Assembly Council is aware that previous attempts at denominational revitalization have not always resulted in what was originally hoped for. The Council begins this work with the prayerful expectation that good fruit might be borne through God's acting and leading.

The Working Group is convened by the Rev. Dr. Jean Morris, supported by the Rev. Victor Kim, the Principal Clerk of the General Assembly and is charged with exploring and recommending pathways that position The Presbyterian Church in Canada in an attitude of openness and possibility regarding the church's future and will report to the Assembly Council and through the Council to the General Assembly.

The Working Group has identified its responsibilities in the following way:

- Reflect upon, review, publicize and reinforce faithful, Christ-centered narratives for the denomination that clarify and encourage The Presbyterian Church in Canada to imagine, learn and act upon narratives that could lead to renewal, transformation and vitality for congregations, courts and agencies of the church.
- Provide a theological rationale that underpins any narrative and invitation to transformational change.
- Present to the denomination faithful stories of hope and possibility that would lead to a renewal in the structures of the denomination.
- Present an ecclesiology that informs any proposed changes to the current structures of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.
- Explore good practices and experiences of other Christian denominations, both in Canada and beyond.
- Reporting through the Assembly Council through at least one in-person joint meeting per year, aim to bring a report to the 2025 General Assembly, intended to inspire direction and vision for the future of The Presbyterian Church in Canada as guided by Christ.

The Working Group has met twice. While still in the initial stages of its work, the Working Group has discerned some consistent themes that have arisen during its meetings.

- We believe that The Presbyterian Church in Canada bears witness to the faithfulness of God in all things and seeks re-orientation by God's active agency in our world.
- We wonder whether The Presbyterian Church in Canada is being called to a season of engaged waiting on God, with renewed time and energy in prayer, scripture and telling stories of God's faithfulness as The Presbyterian Church in Canada seeks God's direction for our future.
- We believe that as a denomination telling stories of hope and possibility, along with stories of suffering and struggle that are part of our life together in Christ, are important as we consider the pathways of possibility that may be before us.
- We understand that the church needs a theological framework to tell or remember to tell, our stories again. We need to recover language that helps us as Christians speak about God and how God acts in the life of the church and in the world.
- We recognize the need to address the structures that shape the ways by which we are organized and act. We realize that our stories will have a primary role in shaping our structures.

While we intend to bring through the Assembly Council in its prophetic role a full report to the 2025 General Assembly, the working group offers this brief and initial update to the church and seeks the prayers of the church for the work of its members.

INTERCULTURAL LIAISON POSITION

With the approval of the creation of a new General Secretary level position – the Intercultural Liaison, the process to search for the first person to occupy the position began in the fall of 2023.

The position description of the Intercultural Liaison was prepared and then approved by the 2023 General Assembly. It was circulated to presbyteries and shared within the denomination. A call for nominations and applications was open until January 15, 2024. During that time, a search committee was formed with careful consideration to ensure its members reflected the diversity of the denomination.

Members of the search committee were: the Rev. Dr. Daniel Scott (convener), the Rev. Bartholomew Alexander, Ms. Yvonne Bearbull, the Rev. Cherie Inksetter, the Rev. Stephen Kwon, the Rev. Angie Song, Ms. Elizabeth Speers.

The committee met by Zoom on two occasions, opening with devotions and prayer at each meeting. The committee agreed on a timeline and their basis for operation. They reviewed the position description and used it as the basis for interview questions and a relevant case study.

Six candidates were interviewed by Zoom with all committee members participating.

The committee considered the relevant experience of each candidate, as well as their responses to a series of prepared questions in order to understand their personal faith journey, fit and call to the position, intercultural awareness, comfort with the doctrines of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and their understanding of the relevant issues of decolonization and racism.

Two candidates were shortlisted for second interviews, which were conducted in-person. In addition, the final candidates provided a written response to questions related to world Christianity and a scriptural basis for an intercultural approach to being the church. The written responses provided an example of their awareness of global Christianity and intercultural issues and served as a sample of their writing capabilities. Reference checks for these two candidates were completed before discerning the recommendation for the Intercultural Liaison for the Assembly Council's consideration.

A unanimous decision was reached by the search committee that the Rev. Dr. Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun (biography below) be recommended to the Assembly Council to be called as Intercultural Liaison.

The search committee was impressed by the number of applications received and by the quality of the candidates who were nominated by presbyteries.

The Rev. Dr. Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun

The Rev. Dr. Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun currently serves as the Senior Leader for Anti-racism and Intercultural Conciliation with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) within Canada and as an Intercultural Leadership Program Consultant with the Tyndale Intercultural Ministries (TIM) Centre. In his role with the CRC, he has collaborated with a national anti-racism and decolonization committee to plan, execute and lead systemic and cultural changes within the denomination. His work includes fostering a network of connected organizations and church leaders nationwide and promoting programs that build relationships, particularly with minority communities. At the TIM Centre, he has been instrumental in redesigning and developing new content aimed at equipping Christian leaders for diverse and inclusive ministry.

Previous to these two significant roles, Pablo served as a Mennonite pastor at Toronto Mennonite New Life Church. There he ministered to a Spanish-speaking congregation, where in addition to pastoral duties, he provided social-emotional support to several members who came to Canada as refugees. Other pastoral roles include being the Lead Pastor at Church for Others in Temple City, California and a chaplain at Fuller Theological Seminary. He has also been an academic mentor at Northwest Baptist College and Seminary in British Columbia, a Louisville Scholar at the Louisville Institute in Kentucky and a Teaching, Research and Program Assistant for Intercultural Leadership and Learning at Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning, a reference group of the Canadian Council of Churches.

In addition to three journal articles and a book chapter, Pablo is the author of *Becoming a Critical Intercultural Church: A Mennonite Ecclesiology in Contemporary Canadian Multicultural Society* (recommended by peer reviewers and the editorial board and is presently under final review for contract issuance) and *Who Are Our Enemies and How Do We Love Them?* published by Herald Press in 2020.

Pablo is of Korean descent, grew up in Paraguay and came to Canada by way of the United States. His academic studies began with a Licenciatura en Teología at the Universidad Evangelica del Paraguay, followed by an M.A. in Intercultural Studies and an M.Div. (emphasis in Christian Ethics) at Fuller Theological Studies. He has a Th.M. from Boston College with emphasis in Christian Ethics and a Ph.D. in Theological Studies from Emmanuel College, University of Toronto.

He is married with a young daughter.

Recommendation ASC-001 adopted/defeated/amended

That the Rev. Dr. Hyung Jin (Pablo) Kim Sun be appointed to the position of Intercultural Liaison for a five year term.

REFERRED OVERTURES – 2024

The Executive received a number of overtures for 2024 and established procedures to prepare responses to the overtures as noted below.

OVERTURE NO. 2, 2024 (See Referred Overtures, p. 1)

Re: A taskforce to examine the impact of housing crisis on congregations

The working group appointed to prepare a response will consist of eight people: 4 named by the Council, 2 named by Ministry and Church Vocations and the Clerks of Assembly; noting that there should be at least 2 clergy and 2 lay representing rural/urban and manse/housing allowance.

OVERTURE NO. 3, 2024 (See Referred Overtures, p. 2)

Re: Arrangements for sale of denominational property

The working group will consist of six people with financial, legal and/or real estate experience: the Commission on Assets (convener of the Trustee Board, the CFO/Treasurer and the Principal Clerk), Director of the Presbyterian Church Building Corporation and two members appointed by the Council.

OVERTURE NO. 4, 2024 (See Referred Overtures, p. 2)

Re: Financial assistance during judicial process relating to sexual abuse and sexual harassment

In 2004, the General Assembly adopted the “Policy for Support of Congregations during Extended Ministerial Leave under the Policy on Dealing with Sexual Abuse and Harassment”. (A&P 2004, p. 231–32) It included that a self-insurance plan for the support of congregations be approved to be funded through the health and dental benefits premiums when and if necessary. This overture is asking for a revision to this policy.

The working group appointed to prepare a response to this will consist of two members appointed by the Council and the Clerks of Assembly.

OVERTURE NO. 5, 2024 (See Referred Overtures, p. 3)

Re: Assistance with long-term and short-term disability benefits

The working group to prepare a response to this overture will consist of three members of the Assembly Council.

OVERTURE NO. 7, 2024 (See Referred Overtures, p. 4)

Re: Presbytery funds supporting withdrawing congregations’ ministries

OVERTURE NO. 8, 2024 (See Referred Overtures, p. 4–5)

Re: Presbytery funds supporting withdrawing congregations’ ministries

OVERTURE NO. 9, 2024 (See Referred Overtures, p. 5)

Re: Presbytery funds supporting withdrawing congregations’ ministries

Three identical overtures, numbers 7, 8 and 9, 2024 were received from the sessions of Chapel Place Church, Markham Chinese Church and Fraser Church, Tottenham, all transmitted with approval by the Presbytery of Oak Ridges.

The overtures concern a presbytery’s use of their portion of the distributable assets arising from the voluntary withdrawal of a congregation from The Presbyterian Church in Canada due to the adoption of Remits B and C, 2019. When a congregation determines to withdraw from The Presbyterian Church in Canada based on the adoption of the remits, most likely that congregation will be dissolved by the presbytery and eventually 50 percent of the distributable assets will be transferred to the departing fellowship outside of The Presbyterian Church in Canada by the Trustee Board, after all the procedures have been followed and all financial obligations have been met. The remaining 50 percent retained by The Presbyterian Church in Canada is distributed in the same manner that is applied to all other dissolved congregations by the policy approved by the General Assembly. (A&P 2022, p. 81–93) Sixty percent of those funds are distributable to the presbytery of the dissolved congregation upon the presentation of an approved and acceptable mission plan to the Commission on Assets. Thirty percent is directed towards the New and Renewed

Ministry Fund of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and 10 percent is distributed to the National Indigenous Ministries Council.

What the overtures seek is permission for presbyteries to use up to one half of their portion of the assets received from the dissolution of the withdrawing congregation to support the ministry of the new fellowship outside of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The overtures seek this permission since currently the church's guidelines in the *Policy for the Amalgamation or Dissolution of Congregations* clearly state that with regard to a presbytery mission plan for the use of proceeds realized through a congregational dissolution, "Funds should not be designated for other denominations or non-church programs. There are several reasons for this. The Trustee Board has a fiduciary and legal responsibility to ensure that The Presbyterian Church in Canada assets are used for the benefit of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. These assets were accumulated through the donations of Presbyterians over the years whose intentions we need to assume were that their gifts be used for the work and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada." (Policy for the Amalgamation or Dissolution of Congregations 2023 version, p. 10)

The Assembly Council sees no reason to consider a change in the policy around how funds from a dissolved congregation granted to a presbytery upon the approval of a mission plan could be used. The policy points out that the overarching intention of the mission plan should be to further the mission of Christ as a legacy to the years of ministry of the dissolving congregation.

As stated above, we need to assume that the assets accumulated through the gifts of Presbyterians over the years were intended to be used for the work and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has many options available to it as to how the mission of Christ can be furthered as a legacy to the years of ministry of the dissolving congregation. Some examples could include but would not be limited to, supporting existing congregations within the presbytery, providing support to individuals of the congregation dissolved due to voluntary withdrawal that wish to continue as members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and perhaps establish a new Presbyterian congregation or creating a missional vision for the work of the presbytery as a whole. It could also include support of Presbyterians Sharing or Presbyterian World Service and Development. Again, there are many options available to the presbytery that would honour the spirit and intention of those who so faithfully have supported a Presbyterian congregation for many years.

Furthermore, the Procedures regarding Voluntary Withdrawal of Congregations from The Presbyterian Church in Canada were adopted by the General Assembly after much discussion, debate and prayerful discernment. They are available to any congregation with disagreement to the decisions reflected in Remits B and C, 2019. The procedures were adopted so that the denomination would have a common frame of understanding around voluntary withdrawal and what the implications of such a decision would mean for both the departing fellowship and those who have chosen to remain. While much has been said about the hardship, financial or otherwise, of the congregations that have chosen the path of voluntary withdrawal, it must also be noted that a clear majority of congregations within the denomination have chosen to remain within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The General Assembly voted to adopt the procedures associated with voluntary withdrawal. Had the voluntary withdrawal process not been approved for limited use in connection with Remits B and C, 2019 then those that move from the dissolved congregation to the new fellowship would not have received any assets as polity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada did not exist for a congregation to leave the denomination. The majority's discernment is that the 50 percent of distributable assets that would be given to the departing fellowship is both generous and fair. In addition, the implications of leaving the denomination, financial and otherwise, are explained to congregations before they vote to depart. These decisions are made with this understanding in mind.

To allow presbyteries to risk their fiduciary and legal responsibilities around the assets entrusted to their care would be irresponsible and to grant the prayer of the overtures would also be disrespectful of the decision arrived at by the denomination through great care and difficulty. The Assembly Council encourages all congregations to find room for the diversity of voices and opinions that make up who we are and to discover that there is still space to effectively carry out the ministry of every congregation within The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Recommendation ASC-002 adopted/defeated/amended

That, for the reasons stated above, the prayer of Overture Nos. 7, 8 and 9, 2024 be not granted.

Overture No. 10, 2024 (See Referred Overtures, p. 5)

Re: Repayment of the denomination's portion of a withdrawing congregation's distributable assets

The working appointed to prepare a response to this overture will consist of the convener of the Assembly Council, the CFO and the Clerks of Assembly.

BIENNIAL GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

At the March meeting of the Assembly Council, the idea of biennial Assemblies, which was last brought before the General Assembly in 2014, was revisited by the Council. In 2013 the Assembly Council asked the Clerks of Assembly to prepare a document for consideration around a possible move to biennial General Assemblies. That proposal, including detailed amendments to the polity and governance of the church, was approved in principle and circulated to the committees and courts of the church for study and report.

In 2014 the General Assembly, after considering the responses received from 71 sessions, 27 presbyteries, two synods, 10 national committees and four others, defeated a motion to hold biennial General Assemblies on a trial basis for six years, including an ongoing review process to reflect upon and evaluate how this change is affecting the church.

Over the past decade, much has changed for The Presbyterian Church in Canada, as has been the case for many Christian denominations. Decline in numbers of congregations, membership and financial support has continued. The landscape of faith and religion in our country, including demographics and migration trends has also impacted the context for ministry within our denomination. Recently, the significant impact of COVID has changed both patterns of gathering and how people engage with their faith.

It should also be noted the General Assembly did not take place in 2020 due to the pandemic, so in effect, the church has already experienced a two-year gap between the Assemblies of 2019 and 2021. The Assembly Council understands that other denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church in Canada meet either biennially or triennially.

The Assembly Council will consider presenting to the 2025 General Assembly a proposal for biennial Assemblies, with a trial period of six years, three cycles, beginning in 2026.

ARCHIVES AND RECORDS

The Archives' regular work includes: cataloguing, creating finding aid inventories for the record collections, assisting the church and the public with their research via email, phone or in-person visits, preservation management of the records collections, records management for the national office and advice for the church, creating educational resources for managing church records, updating the Archives website and managing the national office records centre.

Membership

The Archives and Records Management Committee consists of Ann Blane, Lakefield; Teresa Charlton, Vernon; Elizabeth Millar, Sackville; Marilyn Repchuck, Mount Hope and ex-officio: Geoff Ross, Brampton; Kim Arnold, Archivist/Records Administrator; Nicole D'Angela, Assistant Archivist and Victor Kim, Principal Clerk.

Staffing

Louise Curtis began as a volunteer in January 2023 and she is doing a project relating to the periodicals section. Alex Kay, a previous volunteer, has returned as project archivist on a year-long contract as of April 15, 2024, with the possibility of an extension until April 18, 2025. Her work covers a wide range of archival duties – accessioning, cataloguing, re-appraisal of records and special projects. We are pleased to have them both to assist with many archival tasks and to help with the records preparation for the move to 300 Bloor Street West in 2026.

Presbyterian Archives 50th Anniversary, 1973–2023

The Archives is celebrating 50 years as a distinct facility! An exhibit of photographs and accompanying text reflecting the Archives, the locations of the facility and many of the people involved over its 50-year history is available on the Archives website at presbyterianarchives.ca.

***Presbyterian Record* Digitized**

Digitizing the complete set of the *Presbyterian Record*, 1876–2014, has been completed through the Internet Archives company. Part of this work was funded through a grant from Community Web and the rest through the Archives budget. This periodical is on-line for the use of researchers with functions such as PDF downloads and searchable text. We have had excellent feedback and expect it will be used widely.

Digitizing and Microfilming Program

Congregations are encouraged to copying their records through the Archives. Despite an increase in vendor prices, through ongoing review, we strive to pass along the best costing possible to congregations. This past year, these congregations had their records microfilmed and or digitized: Burns, Erin; Gordon, Burnaby; Kerrisdale, Vancouver; Knox, Harrington; Knox, Toronto; Oakridge, London; St. Andrew's, Kitchener; St. Andrew's, Ottawa; St. Luke's, Oshawa; St. Mark's, Don Mills; St. Paul's, Kemptville; Smithville, Smithville; Taiwanese, Vancouver; Wexford, Scarborough.

Records Management for the National Office

The archivists crafted a full and updated program for the management of active records for the national office. The impetus for this work is due to the impending move to Bloor Street West and the shifting focus from paper records to digital records management. This work will significantly reduce the need for filing cabinets and allow staff to work remotely. The archivists will work with the staff and IT professionals to fulfill the requirements of this project.

Office of the Special Interlocutor (Missing Children and Unmarked Graves)

In 2023, the Special Interlocutor, Kimberly Murray, was appointed by the federal government to investigate unmarked graves and other legal and records issues around residential schools. She has a two-year mandate. As part of the project organizations holding residential school records were contacted to provide details of their records and how they were responding to UNDRIP and the TRC's Calls to Action. In the summer of 2023, the archivists worked alongside Justice Ministries to submit responses to these questions. This process offered a good opportunity to review our collections and policies relating to residential schools.

Bulletins for The Presbyterian Church in Canada's 150th Anniversary

The archivists are assisting national office staff who oversee the creation of Sunday bulletins. Throughout 2025 several archival photographs, with historical context provided, will be featured on the bulletins. These bulletins will showcase the archival collection and remind people of the history of our denomination.

Web Archiving Program

The web archiving program has been in place since 2022 and is a way for congregations and groups within The Presbyterian Church in Canada to preserve the web content they produce. This program is currently funded by Community Webs but this funding will cease at the end of 2025. In this time, we have saved approximately 80 web pages including pages from the national office, Presbyterian camps and ten congregations.

Guidelines for Citing Archival Materials

The Archives has a guide for citing archival materials in written work to be used by researchers accessing our records. It is accessible through the Archives website.

Bloor Street West Move

The move of the national offices of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Anglican General Synod and the United Church of Canada is planned for 2026. The three denominational archives will be moving into the facility. The records storage space will be shared but the three separate collections and individual cataloguing systems will remain intact. The reading room and office space will be shared. We had many collaborative meetings regarding issues of facility planning and design as well as determining the environmental/technical requirements. In the intervening time, our archivists will focus on collections management projects and preparing the records for this move.

Zoom and other Consultations

The Archives staff are available to meet on-line with church representatives regarding their records-related questions. We have also connected with congregations, presbyteries and synods through remote presentations. Zoom affords a wonderful means of connecting with the church-at-large and offering guidance that is in addition to our topical information sheets available on the Archives website.

Recommendation ASC-003 adopted/defeated/amended

That sessions be urged to have session minutes and church registers (marriages, baptisms, deaths/burials) digitized and/or microfilmed through the Archives to ensure a preservation copy is created for these vital records.

Recommendation ASC-004 adopted/defeated/amended

That sessions be encouraged to review their congregations' digital files (e.g., typed minutes, photographs) and apply records management standards to them as they would to physical records and frequently back them up to an external hard drive or USB drive which should be stored in a secure location. Information on standards is provided on the Archives website.

Recommendation ASC-005 adopted/defeated/amended

That clerks of sessions be urged to review annually the location of their historic records and ensure that they are free of mold, mildew and pests and are housed in a clean, secure and stable environment.

BENEVOLENCE COMMITTEE

The Benevolence Committee oversees the administration of the benevolent funds and bursary funds that have been entrusted to the Assembly Council. In addition, the committee acts as the appointers of the Fund for Ministerial Assistance. The committee meets twice a year to monitor and administer the funds entrusted to its care.

Membership

The members of the Benevolence Committee are: Donna McIlveen (convener), Emily Bisset, Karen Dimock, Brent Ellis, Jinsook Khang, Glenn McCullough, with staff, Ian Ross-McDonald, Tim Purvis and Victor Kim (secretary).

Benevolent Funds

The funds associated with benevolences experienced a rebound from 2022 when the market decline resulted in a decrease in the value of the funds. 2023 was a far better year in terms of market performance for the funds. From the income of these funds, on average 14 individuals received monthly support in 2023 totaling about \$88,000. In addition to these gifts and at the request of the Pension and Benefits Board, benevolent funds are supporting six retired missionaries/widows of retirees with a pension supplement totaling approximately \$36,000. Other emergency grants were made on a confidential basis to six individuals totaling \$14,500.

Retired servants of the church and surviving spouses who are experiencing financial need are encouraged to contact the Principal Clerk in the General Assembly Office to discuss whether they might qualify for a monthly income supplement. An application form is available from him. Additionally, there are times when a servant of the church experiences a one-time financial need. These cases may also be brought to the Principal Clerk on a confidential basis.

The Benevolence Committee also distributes the income from the Bremner Memorial Fund, established in 2009 through the generosity of Ronald and Muriel Bremner, in memory of Ron's parents, longtime faithful Presbyterians J. Murray and Catharine Bremner.

Bursary Funds

As with the benevolence funds, bursary funds also recovered much of their market loss from 2022 in 2023. For the 2023–2024 academic year, up to \$100,000 in student bursaries again have been approved. The secretary calls for applications from the colleges at the start of each term. The colleges compile the applications and forward them to the General Assembly Office, where the applications are dealt with and grants made according to the specific terms of the various funds. In addition to the regular student bursaries, \$17,500 was awarded to two doctoral studies candidates from the Cameron Doctoral Bursary Fund.

The committee invites your prayers, concerns and gifts for needy servants of the church. A number of congregations and individuals make gifts to these funds each year. Many letters of deep gratitude are received from recipients each year saying how much it has meant not only to receive much needed financial support but also to know that the church is caring and concerned for their needs. The gifts disbursed from the various funds approximate the income available and so any additional donations to the funds will be well used.

In 2014, the Assembly Council agreed to combine the responsibilities of the Cameron Doctoral Bursary Fund Committee and the Fund for Ministerial Assistance (FMA) with the Benevolence Committee. The minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Ottawa shall be a member of the Benevolence Committee to conform to the original terms of the FMA.

The Fund for Ministerial Assistance

The Fund for Ministerial Assistance was established by an anonymous gift in 1951. Following the death of the donor, the fund was renamed The Honourable Norman M. Paterson Fund for Ministerial Assistance. Senator Paterson and his wife, Eleanor, maintained a life-long interest in the ministers of the church and their families and they hoped that their gesture might encourage others to respond with generosity.

The decisions of the appointers are governed by the terms of the original indenture that stated gifts were to be made available to eligible married ministers. Since then, eligibility has been extended to include ministers who are separated or divorced and have custody of or financial responsibility for, their children. To be eligible for benefits from the fund, the income of the family – not just of the minister – must be less than \$15,000 above minimum stipend (including applicable increments).

The number of recipients fluctuates during the year. In 2023–2024, an average of 21 ministers and 39 children received gifts. In addition, seven ministers on long-term disability received Christmas gifts. The priority has been to maintain the ability to provide the foundational annual gifts that are distributed quarterly; any remaining funds are distributed as additional Christmas gifts. Because of the generosity of the church and the health of the fund it was possible to provide an additional Christmas gift this year to eligible ministers and their families.

In accord with Senator Paterson's hope that the generosity of others would be sparked by his gift, we continue to appeal to members of our congregations for additional gifts to the capital of the fund, so that ministers and their children who are most in need may continue to receive help.

We gratefully acknowledge contributions made to the fund by congregations and individuals; their generosity makes it possible to continue the work initiated by Mr. Paterson.

MOVING THE LOCATION OF THE NATIONAL OFFICE

Who doesn't get excited about moving into a new home! Recently, The Presbyterian Church in Canada signed a lease, along with the Anglican and United Church denominations, to share new national office space at the redeveloped site of Bloor Street United Church at 300 Bloor Street West in Toronto. This move is scheduled for the summer of 2026. The agreement reflects the churches' ongoing commitment to nurturing ecumenical relationships and cooperation, to reducing costs and their carbon footprint.

"This opportunity to be together in this space came out of a relationship and conversation," said Rev. Dr. Michael Blair, General Secretary for the United Church. We are excited about the possibility of the relationship and working together, with a commitment to mission and ministry. We collaborate to be witnesses in the healing of God's world. So, I am excited and grateful for the possibilities."

"The possibility of better ecumenical collaboration in this space will also allow us to make more effective use of our financial and human resources," said Archdeacon Alan Perry, the General Secretary of the Anglican Church. "Being so close to good public transit allows for easy access to visitors to our offices and means we will have less impact on the environment."

The new national office will be part of a development that includes a refurbished Bloor Street United Church, office, community, commercial and worship spaces. The floor plans reflect a more efficient and flexible use of physical space for the new offices and were drafted with input from all three denominations. The Archives of the denominations will also be moved to the new national office building.

As with any significant move, there is much preparation to be done and that work is already underway at our current location at 50 Wynford Drive in Toronto. We are grateful to the staff for their collaboration around the upcoming move. A committee of Assembly Council has been given the task of discerning what will happen to the current national office building.

The hope for our new home is that it will be a place to make new memories and space for new possibilities for ministry that serve the vision of the kingdom of God. We look forward to the possibilities of what this partnership will produce in the years to come!

COMMISSION ON ASSETS ON DISSOLVED OR AMALGAMATED CONGREGATIONS

The Commission on Assets consists of the convener of the Trustee Board, the CFO/Treasurer and the Principal Clerk of the General Assembly.

The Commission on Assets is responsible to approve the plans for the amalgamation of congregations and for mission plans submitted by presbyteries which pertain to the 60 percent of the realized revenue from the sale of dissolved congregations that are returned to the relevant presbytery upon the approval of the mission plan.

Over the past year the Commission on Assets has approved amalgamation plans for 6 amalgamation plans for congregations and presbytery mission plans for 8 dissolved congregations.

DON MUIR NOTICE OF RETIREMENT

The Rev. Don Muir submitted a letter to the Executive indicating his intention to retire as Deputy Clerk of the Assembly and Associate Secretary in the General Assembly Office, effective the end of September 2025.

Recommendation ASC-006 adopted/defeated/amended

That Don Muir's intention to retire as Associate Secretary in the General Assembly Office and as Deputy Clerk of the Assembly effective the end of September 2025, be accepted with thanks.

The Assembly Council Executive will bring forward an updated position description and search process to the Assembly Council in the fall of 2024.

TRANSLATION AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The recommendation from the General Assembly reads, "That at all future General Assemblies, translation to all languages used in the presbyteries of the church be made available as needed, subject to funding being made available by the Assembly Council". (A&P 2023, p. 35)

Given that the languages that are formally used in the presbyteries of the church are English, French and Korean, the Assembly Council determined that the summaries of all reports for the Assembly be translated into French and Korean and be made available to commissioners.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

The Assembly Council will be meeting on May 9, 2024, to consider the Finance Committee's report, following which, the Assembly Council will submit a supplementary report to the General Assembly.

MINIMUM STIPEND 2024

In 2005, the General Assembly agreed that the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) would be applied to the entire grid of minimum stipends and increments and not simply to the level of the fourth increment, as had been the practice prior to 2006. In 2007, a recommendation was adopted by the Assembly as follows: "that the 12 month average CPI as determined by Statistics Canada be used to determine COLA each year; the period to be used will be the 12 month average running from June to May". (A&P 2007, p. 213, 18)

The minimum stipend percentage increase for 2025 will be set according to the 2007 policy and reported to the church in June 2024 when available.

APPRECIATION

The Assembly Council continues to be grateful to God for the commitment, energy, prayer and thoughtfulness of those who serve this church on its committees, agencies and councils. Particular thanks is noted for those members whose terms expire with this General Assembly: the Rev. Jennifer Cameron, the Rev. Mary Fontaine, Ms. Diane Reader Jones, the Rev. Bethany McCaffery, the Rev. Jeffrey Murray, Mr. Peter Rombeek, Ms. Linda Shaw. We note the resignation of the Rev. Jinsook Khang from the Council in 2024.

Jennifer Cameron, Diane Reader Jones, Jeff Murray, Peter Rombeek and have agreed to stand for reappointment to the Assembly Council for a second term.

Cherie Inksetter
Convener

Victor Kim
Secretary