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January 4, 2010

Message from the General Secretary, General Council on Planning for 2011–13

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

If you are a member of the Executive of the General Council, if you serve on the executive of a conference or presbytery, if you are an ordered or designated lay minister in The United Church of Canada, if you are a staff member anywhere in the United Church, if you are a General Council commissioner, or if you are a member or adherent who cares about the United Church, this letter is for you.

I am filled with hope as we prepare this year to mark the 85th anniversary of our church. We are engaging in dynamic ministries, exploring new ways of being church together, and grappling courageously with contemporary issues of faith and justice. At the same time, we continue to rejoice and find community in the eternal mystery that is God. We have much to celebrate and much to look forward to as we discern and live out God's mission in the world.

In the midst of this abundance, we are also facing challenges. Membership in the United Church is declining as church participation moves out of the mainstream in our society. Our financial resources, while rich, are not keeping pace with our costs.

It is in this context that the Sub-Executive of the General Council has directed me to develop a planning document that will shape the work of the United Church from 2011 to 2013.

This document will be informed by the five themes for this triennium that were named in August by the 40th General Council:

- emerging church
- authentic relations with youth and young adults
- outreach, social justice, and care of creation
- faith formation
- becoming a whole people

It will also be guided by the *Call to Purpose* from the 39th General Council, and priorities named by the Executive at its May 2007 meeting (see *Triennium Planning 2011–13 — Background*).

The planning document will respect financial projections provided by the Permanent Committee on Finance that anticipate a shortfall of approximately \$6.5 million for the 2011–13 period. The Executive has also asked me to prepare a three-year revenue generation plan, but we cannot spend the hoped-for new money before it is raised.

Specifically, what I have been asked to develop is a document setting out three distinct options for the period 2011–13, giving rationale as well as cost, program,



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and structural implications for each. One option would entail keeping our current configuration, with reductions to be shared broadly and equitably. The second option would involve radically reimagining the roles and relationships among the General Council Office and the courts of the church to achieve reductions and lift up work in new ways. The third option would be to make deeper cuts than are required to balance the budget, with savings and additional draws from reserves being used to fund innovative work. These options are broadly described here, and the details are not yet filled in. That work will be done over the winter, and your ideas and advice will be gratefully received.

The Executive of the General Council will consider this document at its next meeting in May 2010, and I anticipate that at that time it will choose one of the options as the basis of our work for the next three years.

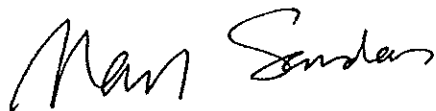
I welcome your input and suggestions, and may share them in various ways and quote from them as this planning process unfolds. Some of the questions you may wish to consider are: How can the United Church best use its resources to live into the themes named by the 40th General Council? Which of these themes should be given the most prominence? How can we do our work more effectively, and in what court of the church should specific work be lodged? What stands in the way? What can we let go of? What shouldn't we let go of? What innovative ways can we be church in our time and place?

Please send your comments by **Friday, February 19, 2010**, to:

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Thank you for your wisdom and insight as we plan prayerfully and faithfully the future directions of our church.

Blessings,



Nora Sanders
General Secretary, General Council