

**To:** [Mardi Tindal](#) ; [Nora Sanders](#)  
**Cc:** [Fred Monteith](#) ; [Carol Hancock](#) ; [Bruce Gregersen](#)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 07, 2010 1:03 PM  
**Subject:** Resignation from 40th General Council, Effective October 11, 2010

Dear Mardi and Nora:

I am writing to let you know that I am resigning as Commissioner of the 40<sup>th</sup> General Council effective October 11, 2010. My involvement with the church continues to mean a great deal to me, and so I have chosen Thanksgiving Day 2010 to leave this role. I have experienced four General Councils and 10 years as a Commissioner, including six years on the Executive. Now, in another phase of life, I am focusing again on my ongoing interests in science, technology and organizational policy and practice.

I am returning to the consulting practice (Walter Sowa & Associates) that I had started in 1996 on my retirement as Director of Corporate Relations and Industrial Assistance Programs at ORTECH Corporation (originally known as The Ontario Research Foundation). There I had spent 33 years of service to numerous organizations in many fields of research, technology and consulting. After my priority became volunteer work for the church, my personal consulting activities were put on hold.

Never has there been a dull moment for me on General Council during this first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Everything, in one way or another, has had to do with people relationships. The work of the church has proven to be a natural extension of my former activities in “corporate” relationships.

To me it seems axiomatic that all of life in its many forms, from birth to death, depends on a Self in relationship to an Other. Jesus expressed this clearly and succinctly for humankind by his emphasis of the First and Greatest Commandment. It is by adhering to that Commandment that the most meaningful human relationships are formed. In a mysterious, purposeful process, the essential steps take place and are made real for us by the creative act of our steadfast loving God, the ultimate source of all that exists. Thus we are in communion with Abba, as Jesus taught. The process is imperfect because it is evolutionary and the time-scale is very long. Nevertheless, every human life-time, however long or short, is the vessel that dwells in time and space in which this creative process occurs. An insight into this mystery of Self and Other is given expression in a Zulu proverb: “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, translated as, “A person is a person through other people.”

As I write, I reflect on what a remarkably eventful and rewarding decade this has been for me. It has been a “decade of opportunity,” the opportunity given to me, time and time again, to work in collaboration with gifted people in their various capacities and positions, from all parts of Canada.

I think frequently of one exceptional group. This special group is the Church Staff, women and men equally. They have been the “Enablers” for anything and everything that I have done. As an example, I remember one staff person who had worked all through the night at the General Council Office to ensure that the Executive had ready all the documents that it needed for the next day. That person took the time to phone me to let me know that in my report I had missed making a connection with a prior decision of the Executive. In a 24-hour day, as a matter of course, this staff person improved and corrected my report before copies went to the Executive. So it is that I find in 10 years I have accumulated an enormous debt owed to all the many staff people who helped me along the way.

Staff members are at the critical interfaces of our Courts. They also are at interfaces of the larger system that includes governments, universities, global partners and representatives of other churches and faiths who engage with us in interchurch and interfaith dialogue. It is at the “interface” that there is the most intense encounter of “Self” and “Other.” Our “unity” as a large, complex and dynamic enterprise depends on the continuous contribution being made through the wisdom, knowledge and energy of our staff. They prepare what is brought to the table. They also set and arrange the chairs for the elected members to occupy. Our “unity” becomes “community.” Occasionally we even sense “communitas,” the spirit of the community.

I am greatly encouraged by the prospects before The United Church of Canada.

I realize that my view runs counter to clear evidence of long-term decline in membership and resources. Reliable census

evidence tells us that millions of people are very much aware of the United Church but they choose to have an “arm’s-length” relationship. As a scientist, I am persuaded by evidence. What this evidence tells me is that the real issue before the United Church is not with what is “quantitative” in the church but with what is “qualitative.” Can greater publicity efforts and expenditures to remedy the “quantitative” have any great success when it is the “qualitative” that must change? What is “qualitative” is the teaching of the church in our time, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The reason that I am encouraged for the United Church is because I believe that we are living in a period of Global Renaissance, a “born again” time of rapid transformation in culture and learning. I believe the United Church will change qualitatively because it has to. After the “qualitative” will come more of the “quantitative”. We are fortunate that in this transformative period we have an abundant threefold strength: (1) we give equal opportunity, recognition and authority to both women and men in our church structures and systems; (2) we provide for equality of the ministry and the laity in our deliberations; and (3) in our equality we honour diversity.

Our current Global Renaissance encompasses all the nations and all the religions of the world. We have a model and a precedent in the European Renaissance of the 1500s. That renaissance fractured the Holy Roman Empire of Europe, broken like the clay pots of Jeremiah. That was a period of upheavals in the profoundest of human thoughts and beliefs of the time. Everyone was affected. The 16<sup>th</sup> century renaissance began with the new perspective of one person, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), a Polish churchman. Copernicus demonstrated by his careful scientific observations, reasoning and conclusions that the long-held ancient Greek views of mankind’s place in the universe and the centrality of Earth in the scheme of things were wrong. Copernicus was shunned. But civilization was changed.

During the same period, another fundamental change in the world-view was initiated by Martin Luther (1483-1546), the German leader of the Protestant Reformation. It was in 1517 that Luther posted his theses attacking the sale of Indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church for buildings in Rome. For his views, Luther was excommunicated and outlawed. But the church was changed, irreversibly.

Around the same time, the Italian explorer John Cabot (1450-1498) sailed westward and landed in 1497 in the New World. He was followed by the French navigator and explorer, Jacques Cartier (1491-1557), who in 1535 discovered a great river. He called it the St. Lawrence, after the Christian martyr of 258. At the time, little value was placed on this cold, remote wilderness. That wilderness became Canada, now the homeland of millions of people and The United Church of Canada.

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century we can be assured that we too are experiencing a profound stirring of minds and hearts of all the peoples of the Earth, connected as we are in so many ways to be Self in relation to Other.

We live in a momentous time. Let us all as the United Church make the most of it.

Sincerely,

Walter Sowa

September 7, 2010