

## **Proposal:**

### **COVENANTING FOR LIFE IN CREATION PROGRAM AND KIT**

#### **For whom**

Presbyteries (main audience), congregations (secondary audience)

#### **Goal**

For congregations and presbyteries to be transformed by engaging in relationships that contribute to the formation of life giving communities that honour the earth and all its inhabitants

As part of the United Church's commitment to live faithfully in the midst of empire, congregations and presbyteries are invited into an active process of 'covenanting for life in creation'. They are invited to do this by establishing or strengthening relationships with marginalized communities that are new and challenging, that go beyond their comfort zone, or in this sense 'risky'. They are invited to discern the transformative ministry arising from this engagement and provide feedback about the proposed Covenant for Life in Creation based on this experience.

#### **As a result of this process, congregations and presbyteries may:**

- be more in touch with the poor in Canadian communities and around the world,
- become more radically inclusive, for example by learning about anti-racism, become more deeply engaged in Aboriginal justice issues, take steps toward becoming an intercultural church
- become more passionate and prophetic in not only proclaiming, but practising the gospel mandate to love our neighbour;
- live out their faith in ways that are less insular and more cooperative across denominational and interfaith boundaries
- become more concerned about offering compassion to and establishing justice for those struggling in society/world
- become more disciplined and joyful about God's call to a costly discipleship
- make the connections between local and global justice issues

#### **Why?**

By forming 'risky' right relationships with those who suffer in today's world, we follow Jesus' example:

*Jesus announced the coming of God's reign—*

*a commonwealth not of domination*

*but of peace, justice, and reconciliation.*

*He healed the sick and fed the hungry.*

*He forgave sins and freed those held captive  
by all manner of demonic powers.  
He crossed barriers of race, class, culture, and gender.  
He preached and practised unconditional love—  
love of God, love of neighbour,  
love of friend, love of enemy—  
and he commanded his followers to love one another  
as he had loved them.*

*Because his witness to love was threatening,  
those exercising power sought to silence Jesus.  
He suffered abandonment and betrayal,  
state-sanctioned torture and execution.  
He was crucified.*

*A Song of Faith, 2006*

### **With whom are we being asked to engage?**

Marginalized communities include:

- those who struggle in the face of poverty,
- those who are discriminated on the basis of gender, class, racial, ethnic or cultural identity, sexual orientation or ability
- those whose human rights are violated
- Others?

“Community” can refer to either a social or geographical grouping

### **What about the Earth?**

The ecological crisis calls us as Christians to tend to the healing God’s creation and our relationship with the Earth. It calls us to form relationships with those who also seek the restoration of God’s creation

### **Where is this coming from?**

As part of the ongoing work of the United Church to live faithfully in the midst of empire. GC 40 declared that :The United Church of Canada is committed to covenanting to live faithfully in the midst of empire in response to God’s covenant with us” and “authorized

the development an education process for engaging with the proposed 'Covenant for Life in Creation'".

### **What will presbyteries and congregations be asked to do?**

Some presbyteries and congregations will already be involved in practices and ministries contribute to the formation of live giving communities that honour the earth and all its inhabitants :

In these situations, presbyteries and congregations could:

- Deepen reflection and learning: Learn more about 'empire"/systemic justice and situate their ministry within this context. This could include conducting and an audit of existing outreach and justice activities
- Discern: Ask themselves that given the context of empire, their sense of call and their own gifts whether there is something new, different they could be doing within this type of ministry? Involve the marginalized groups who are part of this ministry in this process
- Renew and Strengthen:Enact the covenant liturgically to affirm their involvement in this ministry and ongoing journey of learning/transformation through the ministry
- Reflect/Learn: Provide feedback about the covenant, the process and their ministry for GC 41/GC 42

Presbyteries and congregations who are not involved in this type of ministry will be asked to:

- Deepen reflection and learning: Learn more about 'empire"/systemic justice in their context/globally. A principal way of learning would be to engage with those who are marginalized in their context. For example by holding a community panel.
- Discern: Ask themselves that given the context of empire, their sense of call and their own gifts, what new engagement or ministry should they undertake?
- Build: Begin to develop a relationship with the marginalized community and enact the covenant liturgically to begin/affirm their involvement in this ministry and ongoing journey of learning/transformation through the ministry.
- Reflect/Learn: Provide feedback about the covenant, the process and their ministry for GC 41/GC 42

### **The role of presbyteries**

In the process presbyteries could:

- Act as a catalyst for congregational engagement with the covenant. We would then ask presbyteries to facilitate learning on empire at the presbytery level to support

congregational engagement. They would also be asked to gather the results of congregational engagement and send them to us

- Invite 2-3 congregations to act as leaders for this project. They could share their congregations' learnings with the whole presbytery.
- Facilitate both opportunities for learning and engagement. Facilitate learning about empire and begin to engage with those who are marginalized by empire as a ministry of the presbytery. Presbytery would enact the covenant liturgically and send feedback
- Use this process to engage with and learn from community ministries that often are linked to presbyteries. For example a community outreach ministry could be invited to provide learning on a regular basis at presbytery and solicit greater presbyterial and congregational engagement.

#### **Other models:**

- Alternatively a group of congregations could join together to undertake this initiative
- Congregations and presbyteries could chose to build relationships with marginalized communities by working ecumenically and with interfaith partners

#### **How will Presbyteries be contacted and invited in?**

- An initial phone call to presbytery chairs
- By e-mail
- Via Conferences
- Through InfoPac, United Action for Justice e-newsletter, Uniting Ministries, e-newsletter Conference Committees, website, etc.

#### **When:**

- Initial information to presbyteries in August 2010
- Resources will be available by January 2011
- Need feedback from participating congregations and presbyteries for GC 41 report by October 2011
- Given the timeline the feedback could be about the beginning of a process rather than a process which has been completed
- Interim report by working group to PC-PMM September 2011
- Report for GC 41 December 2011

## **Resources**

Congregations and Presbyteries would be invited to draw from this group of resources that would be available online and possibly on DVD

\*\*\*Rusa Jeremic, Education for Justice Animator at the General Council Office will be available to Presbyteries to help animate this process

- 1) Introductory materials
  - a) Written Summary of what they are being asked to do (who, what, where why, when?)
  - b) Power point presentation that includes (who, what, where, why, when) and initial information about what empire is for use at presbytery and congregational meetings
  - c) a worship service with preaching suggestions, plus other worship resources already developed
  - d) You tube clip by Rusa Jeremic – Education for Justice Animator (Rusa has a background in theatre and comedy and will develop a comedic ‘empire’ character)
- 2) Materials to learn about what empire is:
  - a) 3 mini workshops would be contextually based (concrete and have relevance to their context)
    - i) Food security
    - ii) Care of creation
    - iii) Consumerism
- 3) Materials for discerning area of interest:
  - a) 1 mini workshop that would enable congregations and presbyteries to do a conjunctural analysis of their own context, current ministries and gifts that will help them discern the next steps in developing and/or renewing a relationship with a marginalized group,
- 4) Materials to support the development and sustaining of a relationship with a marginalized community
- 5) Materials to reflect on the Covenant for Life in Creation based on the experience beginning to build or renew relationship with a marginalized community for feedback for GC 41

## **Background Documents**

Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire, Report to General Council 40 - <http://www.united-church.ca/economic/globalization/>

Covenanting to Live Faithfully in the Midst of Empire, Report to General Council 41

[http://gc40.united-church.ca/files/8\\_reportsB\\_665-808.pdf](http://gc40.united-church.ca/files/8_reportsB_665-808.pdf)

## **Educational Resources**

<http://www.united-church.ca/economic/globalization/>

<http://www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/missiontheme>

## **A Covenant for Life in Creation**

***(Excerpted from *Covenanting to Live Faithfully in the Midst of Empire, Report to GC 40*)***

God's covenant of grace provides abundant life  
in all of creation.

The weaving of right relations sustains life  
and the wholeness of the one Earth community  
in all of its diversity.

God's gift of life has been distorted and denied through time.

Through human greed and our will to dominate,  
the planet's resources have been wasted.

Suffering, despair, and violence  
plague peoples, communities, and creatures  
throughout God's world.

We name this complex human-made web of domination

“empire.” The many forms of empire  
are the primary obstacles to God's purposes  
of justice, equality, and reconciliation  
between peoples and nations  
and within creation.

We, the people of The United Church of Canada,

in response to God's covenant with us  
covenant to engage in the world.

We covenant to listen to, learn from, and act with  
those who suffer,  
who hunger for bread, justice, and compassion  
and all of creation.

We covenant to live faithfully in the midst of empire.  
We confess that we have turned away from God  
in the selfish destruction  
of life and relationships in creation.  
This brokenness results in false desires and wrong choices.  
It takes the form of an all-consuming global economy  
that victimizes the planet, us,  
the poor, our neighbours,  
and our sisters and brothers worldwide.  
Empire leads to poverty  
and the threat of death for many,  
while only a few grow in wealth and power.  
We commit ourselves to turn away  
from maintaining relationships  
of inequality and oppression.  
We especially think of our relationships  
with Aboriginal peoples in Canada  
and with... *[name groups in your community, in Canada,  
and globally who are exploited by empire and with whom  
you are seeking to build right relationships]*.  
We trust in God's grace and power to transform us.  
We hope in and act with the Spirit of transformation.  
May the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed and lived,  
crossing barriers of race, class, and gender,  
and finally offered his life for  
empower us to new life in love.  
We seek the restoration of relationships  
of respect, non-violence, and peace among all people of faith,  
and within God's beloved one Earth community  
in all its diversity.  
We embrace God's reign of liberation and compassion.  
We witness to the way of solidarity and suffering love,  
the way of the cross and the promise of resurrection.

We seek to live it out in how we worship God  
and seek divine presence in our lives,  
how we make decisions as community,  
how we use the gifts and resources we have been given,  
how we share our faith among ourselves  
with adults, children, and youth,  
how we live out God's good news in the world,  
how we seek justice and act for change,  
and how we minister to one another  
and to the community and world in which we live.

In all these areas we seek

to choose life and resist empire,  
to create sustainable alternatives for the common good,  
to form holistic relationships  
and communities of joy and justice,  
to enact daring discipleship and mutuality  
on the sacred Earth.

We trust in God, Christ, and the Spirit,

grateful for all the prophets and witnesses in faith.

We will care for the future to the seventh generation,

as we journey from death to new life,  
from empire to one Earth community.

We will learn how to follow Jesus

with those who suffer under empire.

Our Creator, the multitude of faithful witnesses,

and the impoverished and exploited  
are beloved and trusted companions on the way.

As people of God,

as part of the worldwide community  
and of God's sacred creation,  
we humbly and joyfully covenant  
to learn to live faithfully in the midst of empire  
and to respond to God's call for renewed life for all.

God be our guide and helper!