

## **Faith Workers Bill of Rights**

**Origin: Alison Miculan Commissioner**

### **1. What is the issue? Why is it important?**

Briefly describe (approximately four sentences) the issue and its significance.

The Call to Ministry is a sacred trust. The covenant of Ordered Ministry is Celebrated in sacred ceremony. In addition to this covenant, members of the order of ministry are also employees who deserve the rights and privileges of all workers in any station of life.

### **2. What is happening now?**

Provide a description of the current practice or policy in question, identifying/citing the source of this information.

Currently, the responsibilities of clergy are well identified through various documents including the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel; Creating Safe and Respectful Environments Policy and a variety of resources for Ministry and Personnel Committees. However, there is no one place where the rights of Faith Workers are codified in a clear and comprehensive statement. There are virtually no policies identifying the responsibilities of members of General Council Staff or the Office of Vocation Staff with respect to their interactions with Faith Workers. Moreover, the current polity is not always consistent with existing labour legislation. A clear understanding of the rights as well as responsibilities of faith workers will make for healthier stronger communities of faith

### **What is the recommendation?**

Describe how the General Council might respond to the issue.

As a denomination that prides itself on social justice, it is clear that General Council would want to protect all faith workers with respect to their rights as well as their responsibilities. We therefore propose adopting the following: "Faith Workers Bill of Rights" into the Manual as part of the formal polity of The United Church of Canada and we would invite communities of faith to sign the Bill as an affirmation of these rights in any of their Call or Appointment processes, as they wish.

## **Faith Workers Bill of Rights**

Preamble: The Faith Workers Bill of Rights, a Universal Affirmation of Dignity and Safety Based on the experiences of many faith workers in The United Church of Canada, this Bill of Rights was created in order to ensure a positive, supportive working environment within Communities of Faith. For the purposes of this Bill, Faith Workers shall be defined as those who are employed within The United Church of Canada excluding those working for General Council Office or the Office of Vocation.

### **ARTICLE I: Right to Dignity and Respect**

Faith workers and their families have the right to be treated respectfully, regardless of their theological position or leadership style.

Faith workers and their families shall not be subject to humiliation, gaslighting, passive-aggression or public shaming by members of their congregation, peers or governing bodies.

### **ARTICLE II: Right to Psychological and Physical Safety**

Faith workers have the right to work in an environment free from bullying, harassment, discrimination and spiritual abuse.

Institutions must take firm and transparent steps to prevent and address psychological hazards as part of their duty of care.

Psychological Safety Statement: At this ministry, we affirm that psychological safety includes the freedom to express respectful disagreement, constructive feedback or frustration—without fear of retaliation, misinterpretation or weaponization. Disagreement is not disrespect.

Expressing concern is not insubordination. We commit to fostering an environment where emotionally honest communication is received with curiosity, not punishment, recognizing that it is essential to a healthy community life.

### **ARTICLE III: Right to Report Concerns Without Retaliation**

Faith workers have the right to raise concerns about misconduct, discrimination or systemic injustice without fear of reprisal. Institutions must implement alternative, confidential reporting mechanisms and enforce a zero-retaliation policy, which means that no adverse actions can be taken against a faith worker for reporting misconduct, discrimination or systemic injustice.

### **ARTICLE IV: Right to Due Process in dealing with complaints or allegations**

Faith workers are entitled to fair, unbiased investigation processes when complaints or allegations arise. Trained, neutral professionals (agreed upon by both faith worker and governing body) must conduct investigations following trauma-informed and legally compliant procedures. Faith workers have the same legal rights as other workers who are protected under the provincial Employment Standards Act or equivalent.

### **ARTICLE V: Right to Institutional Transparency and Accountability**

Faith workers have the right to clear policies, transparent and accessible complaint procedures and timely updates regarding any actions that affect their employment or reputation. Institutions must not misuse confidentiality protocol to protect harmful behavior or silence truth.

### **ARTICLE VI: Right to Recovery and Restoration If Harmed**

When harmed, faith workers have the right to trauma-informed support, including access to therapy, spiritual care of their choosing and recovery leave. Institutions must take steps to

repair harm, which may include public acknowledgment, compensation and reintegration options.

**ARTICLE VII: Right to Stability If Termination Occurs**

Faith workers whose roles require relocation have the right to employment security considerations, including their families. Appropriate severance will be provided to a faith worker losing their position when it is not due to constructive dismissal but is because of a Community of Faith closing or amalgamating with another Community of Faith and employment does not continue.

Termination decisions must account for visa, housing and financial implications.

**ARTICLE VIII: Right to Identity and Expression**

Faith workers have the right to serve without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, LGBTQIA2S+ identity or age. Institutions must ensure that their policies and culture reflect equity and inclusion at all levels.

**ARTICLE IX: Right to Vocational Integrity**

Faith workers must not be coerced into silence, forced forgiveness, forced gratitude or theological conformity that violates their conscience. They have the right to uphold justice, equity and prophetic witness, even when these challenge institutional or societal norms.

**ARTICLE X: Right to a Safe Exit**

Faith workers can end their service with dignity and without character assassination or economic ruin. Communities of Faith must provide accurate references, fair severance and transparent explanations to their communities.

Affirmation: Let this Bill of Rights declare foundational principles necessary to protect those who lead in faith. These rights do not elevate faith workers above others—they affirm that no one is beneath protection, dignity or justice, including those who serve.

Prepared by: Unifor Unifaith Community Chapter in Collaboration with The Canadian Institute of Workplace Harassment and Violence

Agreed upon by \_\_\_\_\_ Community of Faith

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Authorized representative of Community Of Faith

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Background information:**

Provide details the General Council needs to make an informed decision on the proposal.

**4. How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitments on equity?**

Describe in broad terms how this proposal engages with the United Church's established principles and positions on equity.

ARTICLE VIII explicitly affirms the United Church's principles and polity on equity.

**For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

Please select the appropriate option and provide the key discussion points for items being forwarded to the General Council:

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree without forwarding to the General Council
- ☐ Disagree and forwarding to the General Council
- ☐ Take no action at this time

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Who will present (by prerecorded video) this proposal on behalf of the transmitting body?**

Email contact:

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to: [GC45@united-church.ca](mailto:GC45@united-church.ca)