WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada states as one of its Four Priorities of the church to be a “Pro-Reconciling/Anti-Racism” church, and has been aware of the continuing disparity and under-representation of the Canadian church, and yet to date has been unable to reconcile the situation; and

WHEREAS, “Culture” can be defined as “the total sum of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another, as defined in the field of anthropology. Culture can be related to one’s ideology and traditions as well as other areas of living; i and

WHEREAS, the sovereign nation of Canada, and by extension, its Disciples of Christ congregations, hold a unique cultural identity, historical national development, and religious landscape, vastly different than that of the United States of America, which produces citizens with different world-views and social and cultural self-understandings; and

WHEREAS, Canada has additional ecumenical obligations not found in other Regions, namely as founding members and active participants in the Canadian Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches; and

WHEREAS, it has been noted on various occasions at numerous meetings, councils, and boards, that the unique Canadian voice adds a critical and welcome perspective to the overall life of the church; and

WHEREAS, as a unique member body of this denomination, Canadian perspective, worldview, history, culture, and Christian tradition and experience, are valued within the greater body, and as such their participation in and voice within the greater church should be protected and encouraged;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2017 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana July 8-12, 2017, recognizes the Region of Canada to be a traditionally under-represented cultural community within the life of the church and pledges to work to include Canadian content in its pro-reconciling/anti-racism training, marketing, communication, registrations, and forms; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2017 General Assembly urges the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada to become more culturally aware with respect to Canadian culture at all levels of our life together, especially the General Ministries, the Office of General Minister and President, staff, and General Assembly; and
FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the 2017 General Assembly urges the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada to guarantee representation on General Board and its future manifestations as well as be adequately prepared for Canadian participation in special programs and events in the life of the church.

The Region of Canada, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada
Sugarbush Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Guelph, Ontario, Canada

Background

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada stands as a unique expression of Christ’s church on the continent of North America inasmuch as it declares itself one body across an international border. For over 200 years, we have ministered in our two countries under a common cause, eventually coming together as one body.iiiThis unique identity as a bi-national church stands as witness to the importance and possibility of greater Christian unity in our shared continent and world. Disciples of Christ in our two countries covenant to work and worship together in missional, ecclesial, educational, and ecumenical arenas, as one body with one voice. We are a beacon of hope to many inside and outside traditional denominations who look to our model as an answer to the question, “how might Christ’s church work more closely together across so many of our human-inspired boundaries?”

As the Canadian church, we celebrate our ongoing covenant with our American brothers and sisters, and stand proudly and faithfully with the entire church in our mutual witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. While we experience much harmony in our united ministry, there is not yet true wholeness. One of the most difficult aspects of this relationship is the wide gulf between our two core cultural identities – Canadian and American. Neither culture is superior to the other. Although we share some aspects of culture (i.e., some languages, pop culture), in the everyday living of life, church, and society, our two cultural identities are very different in thousands of practical ways.

Despite the strong shared witness to Christian unity, within our denomination there still exists disparity, especially in terms of representation and recognition, between our two expressions of church on either side of the US-Canadian border. Although Canada exists as one of 32 Regions of the CC (Disciples of Christ), it is the only Region which exists also as a sovereign nation with a distinctive cultural identity, a different national history, and a unique religious landscape than that of the United States of America. Within the current structure of our covenant, as a Region, we are limited to the same representation as any other Region, despite being the only one that is not part of the United States of America nor “American” in its self-understanding. Unlike our brothers and sisters in other “traditionally under-represented cultural communities” who likewise have unique cultural self-understandings (albeit still under the American umbrella), we as a people are not afforded recognition of our unique perspective, experience, tradition, culture, or language, and are regularly under-represented in the dominant culture of the American church, specifically, but not limited to:
Dues for participation in the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA are paid by the Council on Christian Unity. However, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada is also a member of the Canadian Council of Churches and incurs dues as a denominational body, unlike any other Region. Due to a misunderstanding, Canadian Council of Churches dues have not been supported in recent years;

Omission of Canadian content in Reconciliation Ministries’ Anti-Racism training events, despite the material being available and a promise in 2012 to incorporate more fully in future events and trainings;

Lack of preparedness on behalf of General Church bodies when Canadian participants are part of a program (e.g. NBA’s XPLOR program had inadequate solutions for the first Canadian participants re stipends, healthcare, and immigration, in the 2016-17 program. Despite knowing many months in advance that Canadians were involved, little preparation was made);

Lack of French language resources and exclusion of French on communications and advertising (e.g., items are often translated in Spanish, Korean, and occasionally Creole, which are not official languages in either country, yet French is omitted despite the fact that is an official language and we do have French-only language congregations who are limited in their full participation in the life of the church);

Regular omission of Canadian content in many resolutions submitted to General Assembly despite information being readily available online concerning Canadian involvement in most issues impacting our nations and world;

Omission of Canadian provincial/territorial options on most registration forms;

Omission of full Canadian Region on maps produced by Communication Ministries; and

General disparity in descriptions of the Disciples of Christ on either side of the border. In letters and announcements from American sources (i.e., OGMP’s office, General Ministries, partners, and in various meetings, dockets, and resolutions) the church is often described as “national”, whereas in Canada it is described as “bi-national”.

In order to gain a deeper appreciation of how deep our cultural differences go, one must briefly examine the following areas: national cultural difference; historical development; and ecclesial culture.

National Cultural Differences

Historically, Canadian and American cultural identities have been described in studies as a “cultural mosaic” and “melting pot”, respectively.iii While many in the United States have moved away from the melting pot understanding in recent decades, it does continue to shape the nation’s identity. Likewise, the Canadian cultural mosaic concept is not fully embraced by all Canadians, yet it is a world-view and ideology that has and continues to shape Canadian action and interaction both nationally and internationally, socially and ecclesially:

“The mosaic is based on our belief that Canada as a whole becomes stronger by having immigrants bring with them their cultural diversity for all Canadians to learn from.”iv
“Melting pot” and “cultural mosaic” are essentially ways of encompassing the American and Canadian ideologies, respectively, toward multiculturalism, citizenship, and integration, as well as linguistic pluralism.

Canadian attitudes toward diversity are evident in manifestations such as:

- The two official languages (French, English). The Official Languages Act was brought about as an act of reconciliation by the dominant English culture to recognize and honour the national contributions of the non-dominant French culture. It being written into Canadian law to “preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French” as a matter of public policy, as well as to “encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of Canada to be both respectful and inclusive of Canada’s multicultural character”
- Ongoing dialogues on Canadian understandings of national unity and patriotism;
- A core Canadian value evident across Canadian culture, and highlighted in recent research appears to be “respect of equality” (and diversity).
- An expansionist immigration policy. Canadians seek relatively high levels of immigration, and welcome immigrants. Since 1990, well over five million new immigrants have been admitted (to a country of only 30 million inhabitants), mostly members of visible minorities.

The Canadian cultural mosaic ideology has a very specific historical rooting, distinct from the U.S.A.’s: “The initial significance of multiculturalism was in the context of policy to accommodate Canada’s English-French linguistic duality. The enduring presence of two national groups, neither of which could expect to assimilate the other, required the acceptance and institutionalization of diversity in Canadian society to prevent its dissolution. Since that time, as [J.G.] Breton suggests, multiculturalism had a singular place in the process of nation-building for Canada following World War II. The declining position of Britain and the rise of the US created a shifting political environment for Canada, and new symbols of national identity were a response.”

Multiculturalism is a matter of Canadian policy.

- The Canadian government established the Official Multiculturalism Act in 1971 and appointed a minister responsible for multiculturalism in 1972.
- Multiculturalism is included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, focusing on the right to maintain cultural heritage.

Differences in Historical Development

It may be a combination of weather, geography and historical economic development of the Canadian nation that has given birth to its population’s understanding of themselves as Canadians, both within the local experience and the national: Canadians are a colony, wired for survival. This attribute of Canadian identity may have become so common sense, so intrinsic to Canadian self-understanding that it is taken for granted and rarely surfaces as a conscious delimiter of a shared identity. But in reality, the way Canadians live, and understand power, government, economics, even their role in the greater world, is shaped by the fact that they are a people relegated to the harsh hinterland, a colony sitting on the “edge of empire.” Canadians have been shaped by geography and the harshness of the Canadian winter. So much of our distinguished Canadian literature, tells the story of survival, of being pitted against the forces of nature, a death-match not always won. As Canadians grew together and learned
that survival was easier, if not full of deeper meaning when done together, they developed a "garrison society,"xiv where socially held standards were adhered to by all, and so they understood the need to support one another, defend one another in the face of threat.

According to Harold Inness,xv this country, colonized by first France and then Great Britain, was opened up along fur trade routes, accessing natural resources to send to the metropole (London). Unlike the United States whose frontier was viewed as an opportunity and a time to express and enact Manifest Destiny, Canadian expansion was economic, not for their own gain, nor for a sense of national pride, but in order to feed the need of a ruling culture.xvi They encountered indigenous peoples, and rather than enter into mutually beneficial relationships consisting of the fair trade of cultural information, they saw only more access to more resources. Canadians dehumanized and exploited for economic gain, some of which would stay in Canada to continue to build the machinery of economics, but the majority going to fill the coffers of empire. In so doing, Canadians set the stage for the development of future habits and patterns of expansion, interpersonal relationships, value of persons, and economic development. Today, while the empire to which Canadians are a willing colony may have shifted from across the sea to south of the border, their approach to life and living remains the same. Canadians are inhabitants of the hinterland, who use the resources of this great land for economic profit often times without thought to the environmental, cultural and human expense.

Differences in Current Religious Culturexvii

While there are some similarities, there also are important differences between the religious trends in Canada and the US. In Canada, both the Catholic and Protestant shares of the population have been falling. In the United States, by contrast, the Catholic share of the population has held fairly steady in recent decades (at roughly one quarter), while the Protestant share has been declining, falling from more than two thirds of US adults in the 1960s to about 50% today.

Also, the share of the population that belongs to faiths other than Catholicism and Protestantism has grown much faster in Canada than in the United States. In the early 1980s, only about one in twenty adults in either country was affiliated with religious traditions other than Protestantism or Catholicism. As of 2011, however, about one in ten Canadians (11%) self-identify as Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish or an adherent of other religions (including Orthodox Christianity). By contrast, the share of US adults who belong to these smaller religious groups has increased more slowly over the last 30 years, reaching 6% in 2012.xviii

In addition, the rise of the “nones” in Canada has been accompanied by a substantial drop in religious commitment in the Canadian public, while key measures of religious commitment in the US have remained relatively stable or declined only modestly.xix For example, in 1986, more than four in ten (43%) Canadian adults ages 15 and older and five (54%) in ten US adults ages 18 and older said they attended religious services at least once a month, according to General Social Surveys conducted in both countries. By 2010, the figure for
Canadian adults had fallen 16 points, to 27%, while the share of US adults who reported going to worship services at least once a month had declined by 8 points, to 46%.xx

Moreover, regional variations in disaffiliation are greater across Canada than across the US. For instance, the share of the population that is religiously unaffiliated in British Columbia in Western Canada (44%) is more than twice as high as the share in Atlantic Canada (16%) and three times higher than in Quebec (12%), according to Statistic Canada’s 2011 National Household Survey, the most recent data available. In the United States, by comparison, the percentage of unaffiliated adults in different regions is closer, ranging from 26% in Western states to 15% in the South, according to aggregated data from Pew Research surveys conducted in 2012.

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xx The origins of our movement in Canada and the United States occurred near the same time in both countries—1810 and 1815 in parts of Canada—with unique developments in British North America, what was to become Canada in 1867. Brief history of Canadian involvement in the bi-national church:
- William Wentworth Eaton taught English at Bethany College in the 1840s and was leader in spreading our movement in the Maritime Provinces of Canada and New England.
- Josephine Wood Smith from Nova Scotia was among our earliest missionaries in Japan in 1881. Many other important missionary and mission-minded people followed, including Alice Porter, Susie Carson Rijnhart, Charles T. Paul, Margaret Stainton, Robert S. Wilson, W.E. Macklin, Mary Rioch Miller, W. C. MacDougall, Alfred Henderson, Lilliath Robbins, Ruth Sinclair, and many others from across the country.
- Archibald McLean from Prince Edward Island served Bethany College as the President and also as the first Secretary of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society.
- James Lord from Deer Island, New Brunswick was an early editor (1895-1911) of The Christian Standard, a publication that continues to serve our independent sisters and brothers in the Stone-Campbell Movement.
- We have contributed many ministers and leaders to the US church and to our own part of the movement.
- For much of the 20th century, until Restructure, the All Canada Committee of the Churches of Christ (Disciples) reported directly to the International Convention—the predecessor body of the General Assembly of our church.

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people who identify with other religions (about 18 million) than Canada does (nearly 3 million) because the US has a much greater total population.

For more information on indicators of both stability and gradual decline in religious commitment in the US, see the Pew Research Center’s October 2012 report “‘Nones’ on the Rise (2012/10/09/nonesontherise).”

Several studies have suggested that survey respondents tend to overstate their frequency of attendance at religious services. However, data analysis in 2011 indicates that the level of overstatement is about the same in Canada as in the United States. See Brenner, Phillip. 2011. “Exceptional Behavior or Exceptional Identity? Overreporting of Church Attendance in the U.S.” Public Opinion Quarterly. Volume 75. Pages 1941.

Atlantic Canada includes four provinces on the Atlantic coast – New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

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The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
ADOPT GA-1725. (Discussion time: 12 minutes)