

# Historic Moment Revisits Basis of Union and Crest

Posted on: August 12, 2012 - 19:16 by Kevin Cox

## New United Church Crest

In what Moderator Mardi Tindal described as “an historic moment,” The United Church of Canada has acknowledged the presence and spirituality of Aboriginal peoples in the United Church by adopting additions to the introductory materials to the Basis of Union as found in *The Manual* and revising the church’s crest.

Commissioners to the 41st General Council gave overwhelming approval on August 12 to a proposal to invite Aboriginal people to become signatories to the Basis of Union and to include changes to the crest to recognize Aboriginal spirituality. The crest changes include incorporating the four colours of the Aboriginal medicine wheel and adding the Mohawk phrase “Akwe Nia’Tetewá:neren,” which means “all my relations.”

It was an emotional moment for British Columbia commissioner Ray Jones, who chaired the Task Force on the Basis of Union and United Church Crest.

“General Council has widened the path, and the gates of the church are open wide for a lot of people who left the church,” Jones said in an interview. “They may see this as a way to come back to the church.”

The move will mean changes to the wording of *The Manual* to recognize that there were at least 60 Methodist and Presbyterian Aboriginal congregations when the United Church was formed. At the time the congregations were included under the Board of Home Missions. Jones noted that in 1925 many Native congregations did not realize that they had not been invited to the founding meeting of the new denomination.

“But with the report [of the task force] we brought out the history, and so 2012 is a much more positive ending. With this vote we can go forward. In Aboriginal congregations there will be a lot of rejoicing,” he added.

The changes to *The Manual* call on the church to recognize the tragic impact that European Christianity had upon Aboriginal congregations and to examine current practices in that light.

“Desire to open ourselves to this dimension of God’s call has brought the 2012 General Council to expand our common declarations within *The Manual* and to include the Indigenous church within the formation of the United Church,” the revised introduction to *The Manual* will state.

General Secretary Nora Sanders noted that the additions to *The Manual* are not changes to the Basis of Union but are additions to recognize what happened in 1925 and what has been done to recognize the Aboriginal congregations.

Much of the debate on the floor centred on changes to the United Church crest, which will now include the colours yellow as a symbol of life and Asian people, black as a symbol of the south and dark-skinned people of the world, red as a symbol of the west and Aboriginal peoples, and white as the colour of the north and white-skinned people.

During debate concern was expressed about the cost of changing the existing United Church crest on everything from buildings to stationery.

Sanders replied that congregations won’t be asked to make immediate changes, but there will be a gradual move to the new crest.

“This is to lift up something new for the future, not to impose a major expense on everybody,” she said.

Moderator Mardi Tindal hailed the inclusive move as an historic moment, but she noted that the vote was not unanimous. The vote was taken after a half hour of debate about how the amended motion should be worded.

“We still hold some tensions,” she said.

