Proposal **Four**
Title: **Review of Joint Needs Assessment Process.**
Origin: **Rideau Park United Church**
Ottawa Presbytery Action: **Transmit with concurrance**

The 40th General Council:

Direct the Pastoral Relations Committee of General Council to review the pastoral relations process, particularly the needs assessment process, with a view to evaluating the time and work load that this adds to the life of the congregation and to the presbytery.

Background:

- Section 41 in the *The Manual* states that "The policy of the United Church shall be that, as far as reasonably possible, every Pastoral Charge shall have a pastorate without interruption.." Adherence to this policy is often difficult because of the requirement for a Joint Needs Assessment Committee (JNAC) process in order to fill a vacancy of a ministry position.

- Following General Council 35 in 1994, the pastoral relations process was separated into two steps: needs assessment and search. This has lengthened the average time between notification of a person leaving and a call/appointment being made to fill a declared vacancy. The workload for a congregation and for presbyteries has increased.

- It has been our experience that JNACs provide useful results for making changes and better serving the church membership and the wider community. Needs assessments, which are intended to consider and review the ministry and mission of a pastoral charge and its relationship with the community it serves, remain useful. Congregations should therefore undertake such assessments from time to time. However, requiring an assessment whenever a ministry position in a given pastoral charge becomes vacant can give rise to a situation where needs assessments are done every few years if a congregation experiences frequent change in ministry personnel. Presbyteries can also feel frustrated when there are more JNACs required than its representatives can reasonably cope with at a given time. This can give rise to tension between Presbytery and a pastoral charge with a vacancy.

- While the General Secretary's letter of November 13, 2007 offered some variations on the JNAC process for consideration, some congregations have not seen a significant reduction in time and effort that they and Presbyteries put into JNACs nor a reduction in the length of the process and thus the period of the vacancy. Indeed, the *Handbook for Joint Needs Assessment Committees* encourages JNACs to follow the process described in the handbook and "not to vary" (p.12).

- While further clarification on the contexts and circumstances in which a variation on the JNAC process could be used may be helpful, the fundamental issue for some congregations is the requirement of needs assessments processes in the context of filling a vacancy. It may therefore be useful to consider whether joint needs assessment processes ought to be uncoupled from the process of filling a ministry vacancy, but nevertheless conducted periodically by a pastoral charge, and that in filling the vacancy, a pastoral charge and its presbytery simply make use of the joint needs assessment current at the time.