

## **TICIF 05 APOLOGY FOR ADOPTION INVOLVEMENT**

**Origin: Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee**

### **1. What is the issue?**

From the end of World War II through into the 1970s, the conventional understanding of “family” in Canada was a single-family unit with an adult mother and father. A young unmarried woman with a baby was not considered to be a responsible parent. Accordingly, many young unmarried women were pressured, coerced, or forced to surrender their children for adoption. The United Church either ran, or participated in running, a number of facilities dedicated in whole or in part to providing a residence for pregnant, unmarried women. We recognize now the harm and hurt caused by the practice of separating young unmarried mothers from their children. As a denomination we share responsibility for shaping the cultural ethos that contributed to this practice.

### **2. Why is this issue important?**

The General Council Executive in November 2013 asked the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee “to research and devise a position paper regarding adoption and create a United Church of Canada statement on adoption.” The GCE took this action in light of a report it had received from an Adoption Task Group, looking at the pressure some women had experienced in the 1940-1980 period to place their children for adoption. The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee did this work and submitted a report to the March 2018 meeting of the GCE.

Another part of the motion adopted by the GCE in November 2013 directed the General Secretary, among other things, to:

“Conduct further research regarding the implications and efficacy of:

- (b) An apology to those adversely affected by historic adoption practice, and the role maternity homes operated by The United Church of Canada played in carrying out these practices.”

The suggested apology is a follow-up by the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee to this part of that GCE motion.

### **3. How might the General Council Executive respond to the issue?**

**The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee recommends that the General Council Executive:**

- (a) Adopt the apology (appended);**
- (b) Put the apology on the denominational website, communicate it via a press release, and give attention to it via social media;**
- (c) Communicate the apology to the four groups with which the Adoption Task Group had contact prior to the November 2013 GCE meeting, namely, Origins Canada, Adoption**

**Support Kinship (ASK), Parent Finders Canada, and the Canadian Council of Natural Mothers;**

**(d) Communicate the apology to the Senate Committee on Science, Social Affairs, and Technology, a Committee that has been studying the issues of adoption during the post World War II era.**

**4. For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council Executive:**

This proposal is a further response to a motion—PMM4—adopted by the General Council Executive at its November, 2013, meeting.

Note: there is further documentation found in [Background Documents](#)

## **Appendix—Apology Text**

### **United Church of Canada Apology for the Church’s Role in Coerced Adoptions**

#### **Preamble**

Within the traditional standards of moral behaviour and societal customs in the 1950’s and 1960’s in Canada, the conventional notion of family was firmly established and defined a single-family unit to be an adult mother and father. Accordingly, a young unmarried woman with a baby was neither considered to be, nor recognised as, a responsible parent. The United Church of Canada shares responsibility for shaping the fundamental attitudes of the cultural ethos at that time. It is to our regret that we acted on that conviction that a single woman with a baby couldn’t be regarded as a responsible parent. Our participation in separating young unmarried mothers from their newly born children was, we now acknowledge, a practice that caused great harm and hurt and for that we are truly sorry.

#### **Background**

The Door of Hope, a maternity facility located in Toronto, opened its doors in 1901, twenty-four years before the founding of The United Church of Canada. Later, the United Church would run this facility, along with dedicated facilities in Burnaby, Winnipeg, and Montreal, and other homes and mission facilities that provided a residence to pregnant women as part of their work. The vast majority of the women who resided at these facilities were not married. Many were vulnerable. During the period between the end of World War II and 1980, most were pressured, coerced, or forced to place their children for adoption.

#### **Apology**

The United Church of Canada apologizes for our participation in the separation of mothers from their children. Our role in pressured, coerced, or forced adoptions created a legacy of pain and suffering. We helped create a culture of shame.

We express our regret for our part in denying mothers their right to love and care for their children. We denied mothers the care and support they needed and deserved. We apologize to the women who were not informed of their rights, and consequently could not provide informed consent. We recognize that many have suffered long-term harm from these actions. We have heard your stories of grief and deep loss. We have heard how you lived with shame and stigma placed on you by the church and society. We are truly sorry.

The children who were adopted were not given the opportunity to know their family and

community of origin. Some were misled or lied to about the circumstances of their birth. We apologize to those of you who struggle to find a sense of identity and belonging, to those of you who feel torn between two families and communities, to those of you who live with a sense of uncertainty within yourselves.

We regret that as a church we have, too often, neglected the message of our faith: that our bodies and our sexuality are part of the goodness of creation. In our zeal to uphold a rigid system of morality, we helped to shape and spread a shame-based code with regard to sexuality, which ignored the much more important call of our faith to create communities in which every member is welcomed and valued. We told women that having children outside of marriage was a sin. We supported the removal of children from their mothers and from the communities which could have given them dignity and support.

We recognize that these practices also affected fathers, excluded from their children's lives. We acknowledge the hurt caused to brothers and sisters, grandparents, partners, and members of extended families who have shared in the pain of their loved ones.

Regretting our past history of shaming women, The United Church of Canada commits:

- ⇒ to examine and challenge all beliefs that promote the shaming of any person;
- ⇒ to change our language and practices to better honour the dignity and worth of each human being;
- ⇒ to support and celebrate all families that create safety, love, and opportunity for their members;
- ⇒ to uphold the values of truth and to openness and encourage healing and reconciliation for everyone affected by adoption.

The United Church of Canada sincerely apologizes for our regretful and damaging role in pressured, coerced, or forced adoptions.