

## "The Blueprints"

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Now Canadian history indeed has violence. We have our own horrific marks of colonialism, oppression, and using violence against those who stand in the way of the government. However for the formation of Canada itself, we had a tiny fraction of the unrest that Ireland and America ever did. We were frankly boring, asking for independence and receiving it from the British Empire to remain a part of the Commonwealth while not having to bomb any buildings to do it.

Similarly, our church history has a veneer of polite boringness. Many denominations, including ones in Ireland and the UK, and in the US, have histories of civil unrest, threats of violence or destroyed property, government resistance, and straight up jailing people who disagree with their theology. Whether it is the Southern Baptist Convention forming to endorse slavery, the Lutheran church forming to reform against the perceived corruption of the Catholic Church, or the granddaddy of dramatic denominations with the Roman Catholic Church being involved in practically every Christian dispute, Christian church structures are made by humans, and humans are messy. While the UCC has our problems, I feel confident saying we never jailed anyone who said that the Nicene Creed had some good points. Our development was slow. It took decades of meetings across the country with churches across the political, social, and theological spectrum. And it was boring to write about. But it happened with the only death calls being people warning it would kill the church.

After a decade of discussion, we finally meet in 1925 and have the inaugural worship service. A colorful and display of mixing our Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and Methodist traditions, it showcased how we as the newly minted UCC would work together.

But now there is a problem. Who is leading this thing?

When it came to deciding the polity of the UCC, how we would organize our structure as congregations in one denomination, we had a few templates to work with. Right away the Catholic thing with the Pope would not work. On the other end, being completely independent wouldn't work either. After a lot of discussion about the pros and cons of committees, the

solution was to let congregations have independent financial autonomy, while reporting the clergy to the presbytery (and conference) level. A National office would tie everyone together and take care of the mission and service, the evangelizing and policy-making.

The leader would be the Moderator. This was not a new concept, as the Presbyterian Church of Canada elected their first Moderator of the General Assembly in 1875. Many other denominations have one. And for this still marinating denomination, with the flavours of each church still brewing away, a moderator is what made the most sense.

The term for the moderator would be 2 years, now expanded to 3. If your moderator is good, then you can find a similar one for the next vote. If you didn't like them, well you only had to outlast them. No life-time positions, no chance of re-election.

The moderator does not need to be an ordered minister. They can be a lay person in the church, just a member of good standing who has been nominated.

Moderators are nominated by their peers to either the region or to general council before the general council gathering. They then meet, are given time to present their vision, and there are several rounds of voting.

The moderator is just that- they moderate. The pope is God's representative here, and he can enact rules that the church must abide by. In independent churches, they rely on the leadership of either the pastor or a council of elders. But a moderator is not there to enact sole executive decisions. They are part governor general, part ambassador, part pastor, part prophet, part executive chair of the church.

It takes a great deal of trust, a great deal of faith, to agree to a model like this. There will be absolutely times where we get it wrong, or human error takes a stronger spot in the church.

The moderator's vision for the church, for their brief and important term in the position, is a reflection of where the church believes it needs to focus for the next 3 years. Is it looking for a pastor or prophet? Do we need a shepherd who will give us reassurance and comfort in tumultuous times? Or someone who will lead us through risks and bold moves, challenging the status quo? Neither are bad ideas, just how do we discern what is the best option?

This week's reading is one where we wrap up the Abraham story, where the early church sees how the covenants of Abraham and Sarah. Remember that Paul in his early letters is telling his flock that Jesus is returning in a matter of months, maybe years. By now, he is addressing that many people have died as Christian, but Jesus isn't back yet. Paul is reassuring them that the Abraham and Sarah didn't make covenants with God expecting immediate results. Have faith now, and know that God will be with them in this life or the next. This letter was originally written about how Jesus, a Jewish man, fit into the larger tapestry of Jewish theology. Paul is, for our purposes, telling them to not worry about them. As children of God, they are doing their best and God is with them. They couldn't plan twenty moves ahead, only doing what they could with the information they had.

To become moderator and lead a denomination is another covenant. A covenant between the new moderator, the church and its people, and with God. To love and serve them, doing your best, and knowing that you are not doing this on your own. Every moderator has a whole church behind them offering feedback, support, prayers, and the hope that this next triennium of the church is one with the continued compassion for the oppressed, energy to embrace the future, and the continued discernment of God's presence.