

For Immediate Release  
Thursday, July 22, 2010

#### United Church Says Census is Critical to its Mission

Toronto: The United Church of Canada has added its voice to those protesting the government's recent decision to eliminate the mandatory long-form census. In a letter this week to Industry Minister Tony Clement, the church urged the government not to implement a voluntary system of collecting detailed census information.

"We see this as a step backward at a time when Canadians need access to reliable census information to help build a more equitable and just society," says the Rev. Bruce Gregersen, General Council Officer, Programs.

He adds that because the long-form census also contains questions related to religion, it would be a great loss to faith communities and to the country in understanding the multiplicity and richness of the spiritual makeup of Canada.

Gregersen says like other non-profit organizations and charities, the United Church benefits from the wealth of data that is collected and analyzed by Statistics Canada.

He explains that many local United Church congregations, particularly those facing significant demographic change, use census information to help identify community needs within the neighbourhoods they serve.

"Knowing who your neighbours are is an important part of adapting congregational outreach programs and advocacy initiatives that are integral to the church's mission," says Gregersen.

"Responding to community needs, both spiritual and social is how the United Church, its congregations, and its members live out our faith in this world," says Gregersen. "Losing the statistical tool that helps to identify these needs will seriously handicap our ability to respond as effectively in the future."

For more information, please contact:

Mary-Frances Denis

Program Coordinator, Media and Public Relations The United Church of Canada 416-231-7680 ext. 2016 (office)

1-800-268-3781 ext. 2016 (toll-free)

[mdenis@united-church.ca](mailto:mdenis@united-church.ca)

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Thursday, July 22, 2010

The Honourable Tony Clement  
Minister of Industry  
C.D. Howe Building  
235 Queen Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H5

Dear Mr. Clement,

I am writing on behalf of The United Church of Canada to express our concern regarding the elimination of the mandatory long-form census.

At a time when Canada is rapidly changing, Canadians need more, rather than less access to reliable census information to help build a more equitable and just society. We therefore believe that introducing a voluntary long-form household survey is an ill-advised move on the part of the Canadian government, and will ultimately lead to a significant loss of important public information concerning societal trends.

As well, like many other charities and non-profit agencies, The United Church of Canada benefits from the wealth of data that is collected and analyzed by Statistics Canada. The church relies heavily on Statistics Canada data for the planning of its mission priorities. Local congregations, particularly those facing significant demographic change, use Statistics Canada information to help identify community needs within the neighbourhoods they serve.

Responding to community needs, both spiritual and social, is how the United Church, its congregations, and its members live out our faith in this world. Knowing who our neighbours are is an important part of adapting congregational outreach programs and advocacy initiatives that are integral to the church's mission. Losing the statistical tool that helps to identify these needs will seriously handicap our ability to respond as effectively in the future.

I would also like to echo the concerns raised by both the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada with regard to the significance of questions related to religion contained in the long-form census. It would be a great loss to the church and to the country if Statistics Canada was not able to provide statistically valid information that will help us in understanding the multiplicity and richness of the spiritual makeup of Canada.

And finally, speaking on behalf of a faith community that has gathered its own denominational statistics annually since 1925, I must emphasize the importance of reconsidering this decision and allowing Statistics Canada to maintain the historic integrity of the data that is collected with the compulsory long-form census. It is indeed a rich storehouse of information that must not be compromised in this way.

Sincerely,

Nora Sanders,  
General Secretary, General Council

CC: Right Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada Hon. Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada Marc Garneau, Liberal Party of Canada Industry Critic Hon. Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party Brian Masse,

New Democratic Party Industry Critic Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois  
Robert Bouchard, Bloc Québécois Industry Critic.