

'Look for union collar'? Canada clergy organize: Low wages, abuse by congregants

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Ministers of the United Church of Canada, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, have launched an unprecedented drive to unionize, saying they have been victims of harassment and emotional abuse for too long.

Representatives of the church met in Toronto last month alongside leaders of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) to sign union cards and to begin a campaign to sign up the church's 4,000 clergy.

The step is a first in North America. In Great Britain about 2,000 clergy and employees of the Church of England have been members of Amicus, a large union, for about a decade.

The United Church's general secretary, Jim Sinclair, responded November 12 by saying that the adversarial approach of labor relations is inappropriate for clergy. "Unionization of the clergy would fundamentally change the theological understanding of the covenant role [of] a minister . . . [and] the relationship with her or his congregation." The church has taken steps to increase support for clergy in recent years, he said.

The proposed move to organize followed a month of discussions between concerned clergy and the CAW, which normally deals with autoworkers, airline industry personnel and some miners. The union will assign full-time staff and other resources to the new members.

Clergymen David Galston and Jim Evans, who are spearheading the drive, said at a news conference that low wages, lack of security and ongoing abuse of clergy by congregants, and the failure of officials to address it, compelled them to take the step. Evans, who left his church after a conflict with his congregation, said he and other ministers have heard many "sad stories" involving bullying and stalking, pay

being withheld, insults and smear campaigns. -*Religion News Service*