

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Saturday, November 15, 2014

The second day of the Council's gathering began with a celebration of the eucharist, with PWRDF partner the Rev. Laura Marie Piotrowicz presiding and preaching.

Orders of the day

After members sang a hymn, the Very Rev. Peter Wall, co-chair of the Planning and Agenda Team, outlined the agenda for the day before turning the floor to the chair, Archbishop Fred Hiltz.

Dialogue in the midst of conflict

The Rev. Dr. Karen Egan facilitated a discussion designed to help COGS members engage in a helpful way with difficult issues that may emerge during the church's discernment about proposed changes to the marriage canon.

Excerpts of a TED Talk on engaging positively with difficult situations was viewed, with the role of "third siders" being highlighted: individuals and groups who seek to understand both sides of a conflict, encourage a process of cooperative negotiation, and support a wise solution that fairly meets the essential needs of both sides.

Council members broke into table groups and discussed some of the following questions:

- How are the potential changes to the marriage canon being talked about in your context?
- How would you describe the different sides?
- How would it feel to assume the role of "third sider" in your context?
- What would you need to put aside to assume the role of a "third sider"?
- To whom would you have to listen most carefully to understand their side?
- How many different sides are there in your context?

The members were then invited to read Acts 2:1-18 as an "origin story for the church" and reflect on how it contains examples of "third siders" at work in the midst of a dispute.

Commission on the Marriage Canon

The Primate began the session with a prayerful reading of the 2010 General Synod's "Discernment on Sexuality," followed by a prayer for the work and members of the Commission on the Marriage Canon.

Canon Robert Falby, the commission's chair, and Bishop Linda Nicholls, a member of the marriage canon commission provided an update to the Council on its work.

Canon Falby clarified that the commission's role is not to debate the merits of same-sex marriage, but rather to fulfill the specific provisions of Resolution C003 of General Synod 2013, namely to furnish COGS with a draft motion "to change Canon XXI on Marriage to allow the marriage of same sex couples in the same way as opposite sex couples," while respecting the resolution's request for broad consultation, conformity with the Solemn Declaration, inclusion of a conscience clause, and provision of a biblical and theological rationale for such a change in the church's teaching on marriage.

He announced that one of the commission members, the Very Rev. Kevin Dixon of the Diocese of Huron, has resigned for personal reasons. He will not be replaced given the advanced stage of the commission's work.

A total of 222 individual submissions had been received by the commission's deadline, along with other contributions from parishes, dioceses, bishops, theological colleges, and other

organizations within the church. All have been read and taken seriously by the commissioners. An annotated bibliography on relevant issues has also been compiled for use by the commissioners, and will be available more widely.

Various partners have been consulted—or are in the process of being consulted—on the marriage canon question, including Indigenous peoples (through bishops of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples), the Anglican Communion (through Inter-Anglican Standing Committee on Unity, Faith, and Order), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (through a submission from the National Bishop and the Joint Anglican-Lutheran Commission), the Roman Catholic Church (through the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada), and the United Church of Canada (through the Anglican-United Church Dialogue).

The commission's final report, which will be submitted to the fall 2015 meeting of COGS, will be prepared in such a way as to make it as accessible as possible for delegates of General Synod while also including appendices for those who want a more detailed account of the commission's work and conclusions.

Bishop Nicholls acknowledged that in some respects the commission's task is a "no-win proposition," and regardless of the results of their work there will be those who are "unhappy, in pain, struggling, and trying to hear."

She also noted that one of the commission's challenges has been the fact that the Anglican tradition does not have a single accepted theology of marriage.

The commissioners expressed concerns about how the marriage canon motion will be dealt with procedurally at the next meeting of the General Synod, and expressed a particular desire that appropriate provisions be made for Indigenous Anglicans to express themselves.

The commission will provide another update on its work to the spring 2015 meeting of COGS and present its final report to the Council at its fall 2015 meeting.

A brief discussion followed, during which it was asked how COGS members might engage people in their respective communities about this conversation in advance of 2016. It was suggested they read the submissions to the Commission on the Marriage Canon, which are available online, and seek out other online Anglican theological resources on human sexuality produced in recent years.

Planning for General Synod 2016

The Very Rev. Peter Wall, chair of the General Synod Planning Committee, provided an updated on preparations for the 41st General Synod, which will take place 7-12 July 2016 at the Sheraton Parkway Toronto North in Richmond Hill, Ontario (just outside Toronto).

Dean Wall said the planning team is confident that five days will be sufficient for the General Synod to complete its work. The electronic voting system used for the first time in 2013 was generally well received and may be used again in 2016.

He believes the budget appropriated for the General Synod is adequate, adding that "very favourable room rates" have been negotiated with the hotel, as well as meal plans.

A financial reserve is being set aside for dioceses that may need to request subsidies for their delegates.

Transportation logistics are still being worked out.

Special guests may be invited to the General Synod, including "churches with whom we have special relationships," such as the Episcopal Church in Cuba and the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem.

Dean Wall added that work on building the 2016 General Synod's agenda is already underway, and acknowledged that the debate on the marriage canon motion will be a significant part of the deliberations.

It was acknowledged that there was some disagreement over the seating plan for the 2013 General Synod, with some preferring to be seated as diocesan delegations rather than in mixed

groups. In response, Dean Wall introduced a motion that was discussed and approved by consensus.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod approve a seating plan for General Synod 2016 that incorporates members seated, at times, in diocesan groups and, at other times, in mixed tables, dependent on agenda items.

It was requested that the planning committee be attentive to where youth members of General Synod are seated, and to the needs of members whose first language is not English. The possibility of some simultaneous translation is being explored.

The gathering's theme will be drawn from Isaiah 43:10: "You are my witnesses." Staff members Lisa Barry and Saskia Fielder from Communications and Information Resources presented some of the draft audio-visual and graphic elements being prepared incorporating this theme. Council members were invited to offer feedback.

Following a lunch break the members of the Council reconvened for a time of prayer and Bible study focused on 1 Kings 19:7-21.

'New Ways of Working'

General Secretary Michael Thompson recalled that Vision 2019 called on the Primate to convene a conversation about structural changes in the church that better serve its service in God's mission.

As a result, this triennium is a time of experimenting with "new ways of working," such as moving from standing committees that meet in person to coordinating committees convened electronically, with one big "kick-off" meeting at the beginning of the triennium. Programmatic work is related to the Council through "COGS Associates" who are connected to each of the coordinating committees.

Now these new ways of working are in place there

is an opportunity to identify their positive and negative consequences, to determine what has been learned and what refinements might be needed.

Input will be sought on an ongoing basis from COGS, the coordinating committees and their stakeholders, and staff. An initial report will be presented to the spring 2015 meeting of COGS and concrete proposals on modes for working for the next triennium will be offered to the 2016 General Synod.

The members of COGS then divided into small groups to discuss their own experience of the new ways of working. Some of the feedback later shared with the wider group included:

- The nature of some of the coordinating committees' work might still occasionally require face-to-face meetings.
- Is COGS hearing clearly from the coordinating committees? Are COGS Associates clear about their roles and responsibilities?
- Are these new ways of working actually accomplishing their intended objectives?
- The new ways of working do seem to be saving money.
- There are technical issues related to electronic means of meeting.

The General Secretary concluded that "we are in a good place at this point in the triennium" with respect to the new ways of working. The Primate agreed, and commended the General Synod for taking the risk of trying some new things. He also acknowledged that the new ways of working have been a particular challenge for the General Synod staff, of whom he said that they have nevertheless "embraced it well."

Primate's Commission on Discovery, Reconciliation, and Justice

Archbishop Terence Finlay and the Rev. Andrew Wesley updated the Council on the commission's work, which is focussed on giving tangible expression to the 2010 General Synod's formal renunciation of the doctrine of discovery.

They described the commission's work as

threefold. First, they have begun to develop a theological reflection on the doctrine of discovery and its continued impact on colonial thinking. This includes a discussion of ways in which the doctrine might be dismantled.

Secondly, they have continued to consider what reconciliation looks like in parishes and communities, particularly around the understanding of healing and wholeness, and the Circle of Life.

Thirdly, they are exploring how the quality of life in Indigenous communities could be improved by understanding the nature of treaties and the Indian Act.

Archbishop Finlay reported that there was a consensus among the commissioners that they were just beginning to grapple creatively with the immense breadth of issues in their mandate, and that they would only be able to offer an interim report to the 2016 General Synod.

In expressing his appreciation for the commission's work, the Primate said it will form a piece of the Anglican Church of Canada's solid commitment to right relations with Indigenous peoples beyond next year's conclusion of the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Primate concluded the afternoon session with a prayer for the commission and its staff, following which the Council adjourned for dinner.

Indigenous rights, responsible resource extraction, and climate change

Following the singing of a hymn, Henriette Thompson, the Director of Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice acknowledged the Mississauga of the New Credit, on whose traditional territory COGS is meeting.

She and National Indigenous Bishop Mark MacDonald facilitated a session linking Indigenous rights, responsible resource extraction, and climate change, all issues on which the Anglican Church of Canada has taken formal positions.

Bishop MacDonald introduced a screening of *Remember the Land: Global Ecumenical Voices on*

Mining, a video produced by KAIROS following the Ecumenical Conference on Mining held in Toronto in 2011 (available at www.kairoscanada.org). He said that the world is very aware of Canada's role in international resource extraction, even if we are relatively oblivious to the negative impact Canadian mining and petroleum companies have in different parts of the world, including Canada. Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by resource extraction.

After viewing the video the Council members were invited to discuss whether there are ways in which the moral and ethical issues it raised can be an opportunity for our individual or collective action.

One response is responsible investing. Ms. Thompson indicated that the General Synod is cataloguing various ethical investment policies in an effort respect our commitment, articulated in the 2013 Joint Declaration, "to advocate for responsible and ethical investment and actions by individuals, faith communities, corporations, and governments both in Canada and around the world."

Global Relations

Andrea Mann, Director of Global Relations, highlighted the General Synod's commitment to maintaining a strong, sustainable relationship with the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem.

One of the most visible ways in which this is being expressed is through Jerusalem Sunday, which was commemorated for the first time on June 1, 2014. The total number of Anglican communities that marked the inaugural Jerusalem Sunday is not known. However, we can celebrate that 32 congregations did raise a total of \$7,690 for the Penman Medical Clinic in the West Bank.

Next year's Jerusalem Sunday will fall on May 17. There are plans to include a greater breadth of liturgical resources, including a full eucharistic service, hymns in Arabic, and Sunday school resources. An online resource highlighting the difference between religious tourism and authentic pilgrimage is also in development. Our full communion partners in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the Episcopal Church,

and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have also expressed an interest in also observing Jerusalem Sunday.

Dr. Mann also provided an update on the General Synod's efforts to honour its 2013 resolution on peace and justice in Israel and Palestine (A172). These have included meetings with pertinent government authorities and diplomats, coverage of relevant issues in the *Anglican Journal*, and the organization of a national conference on Christian Zionism next April.

Efforts are also underway to renew church-to-church relationships between the Anglican Church of Canada and the wider Anglican Communion, especially through the Companion Diocese Relationship program.

A recent survey revealed that 21 out of 30 Canadian dioceses have some form companion relationship with another Anglican diocese in Canada or abroad. A Canada-Africa Companion Diocese Relationship Consultation will take place in Burundi next May.

Dr. Mann also highlighted the Anglican Church of Canada's long-standing partnership with the Canadian Churches Forum for Global Ministries, particularly encouraging church members to participate in its programs aimed at increasing awareness of—and developing skills for—ministry in intercultural contexts. Some bursaries are available to encourage such participation.

Key messages

To conclude the day's proceedings, Dean Peter Wall invited each of the table groups to compose "a single headline for tomorrow's newspaper on what COGS did today." The results include:

- "You are my witnesses" General Synod 2016 theme
- COGS prayerfully listens to each other on marriage commission
- COGS is not shying away from global issues
- Canadian church aghast at Canadian mining record abroad, contemplating action
- It's been a big day; lots to celebrate
- Council explores balcony role in marriage

canon issue

- Council celebrates the peaceful effects of infant participation
- General Synod 2016: "I witness" account coming soon
- Council's "third-side" role in the coming difficult conversations

The day's proceedings were adjourned and the members of the Council proceeded to the chapel to pray Holden Evening Prayer.