

# COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Sunday, November 16, 2014

## Orders of the day

The Council's third and final day of deliberations began with the Very Rev. Peter Wall, co-chair of the Planning and Agenda Team, briefly reviewing the orders of the day.

## Pension Committee

Pension Committee trustee Bob Boeckner provided an update on the state of the General Synod Pension Plan (GSPP), introducing a series of resolutions aimed at "cleaning up and bringing up to date" various aspects of the plan's administration and governance, all of which were approved by the Council.

Actuary D. Cameron Hunter outlined the General Synod Pension Plan's financial position. The plan is currently 97 per cent funded with a market value (as of December 2013) of \$690,723,000. The pension plan's investments continue to bring "quite positive" returns.

Issues that continue to face the General Synod Pension Plan include permanently resolving the solvency funding requirement, volatile investment markets, and a declining number of active (contributing) members.

Possible long-term solutions to some of the challenges include merging the Lay Retirement Plan into the General Synod Pension Plan and/or inviting non-Anglican religious or community-based groups to participate in the GSPP.

## 'An Indigenous Call to Church Leadership'

With a standing ovation the Council acknowledged the presence of the Rev. Canon Virginia ("Ginny") Doctor, who is returning to her work as Coordinator for Indigenous Ministries after a lengthy serious illness.

Canon Doctor, Bishop Mark MacDonald, Bishop Lydia Mamakwa, and Archdeacon Sidney Black together presented a document entitled "Where We Are Today: Twenty Years after the Covenant, an Indigenous Call to Church Leadership."

The statement outlines the "next steps of self-determination" for Indigenous members of the Anglican Church of Canada, providing background, naming a set of principals, and outlining an implementation of this vision. Moving into this "next level of our self-determination" will include developing a plan for "an effective, just, and sustainable sharing of resources" and "new forms of governance and relationship that reflect Indigenous cultural understandings and practices in a biblical and Christian framework."

In addition to COGS, the statement is being presented to the House of Bishops, the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP), and the Primate's Commission on Discovery, Reconciliation, and Justice. After engagement with these different groups, a version of it will come before ACIP's 2015 Sacred Circle.

Council members agreed that this substantive statement required additional time for discussion, which would continue in the afternoon.

## General Secretary's report

General Secretary Michael Thompson highlighted what he described as an ongoing "movement toward partnership and collegiality" among the various work areas of the General Synod, which are increasingly being understood as *ministries* rather than *departments*.

One recent examples of such collaborative work include the fulfilment of our church's commitments to the Truth and Reconciliation

process, which involves staff and resources from the General Synod Archives, the Anglican Healing Fund, Communications and Information Resources, the *Anglican Journal*, and Public Witness and Ecological Justice.

He noted other initiatives that positively cut across different General Synod ministries: Jerusalem Sunday and the Task Force on Social Media, He also cited cooperation between General Synod and local/diocesan ministries in such areas as Vital and Healthy Parishes, the creation of resources for catechist training, the development of an integrated national communications strategy, diocesan newspapers, and a soon-to-be launched major gifts initiative.

Our church's ongoing leadership ecumenically and within the Anglican Communion was also highlighted. The General Secretary also encouraged new opportunities for the church at all levels to seek partnerships with individuals and groups who may be outside the church but possess the expertise we may lack in seeking to fulfil God's mission.

### **Reflections from partners**

Ms. Pat Lovell, the COGS partner representing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) expressed her appreciation for the three days of the Council's deliberations.

She found the first day's discussion on statistical information discussion surprisingly interesting and helpful, given the ELCIC is facing some of the same challenges in local information gathering.

Ms. Lovell also appreciates the "depth of consultation" at which the Anglican Church of Canada is engaging with the marriage canon conversation, and the desire to engage in that discussion in healthy ways.

The COGS partner from the Episcopal Church, Ms. Martha Gardner, expressed her special appreciation for Sister Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas, SSJD and her liturgical and pastoral role as the Council's chaplain.

Procedurally, Ms. Gardner suggested COGS move

approval of the General Synod budget to the end—rather than at the beginning—of its agenda. This would afford the members more flexibility if they wished to adjust the budget in light of information shared earlier in the Council's proceedings. She also expressed a desire for the whole Council to hear at least briefly about the work of all the different coordinating committees at each meeting.

*Proceedings adjourned for a celebration of the eucharist presided over by the Primate. In his homily he touched on the international White Ribbon campaign to end violence against women and girls, of which the Anglican Communion is a partner. He led the assembly in the recitation of the following pledge: "I will not commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women."*

### **Settlement Agreement**

Following a break for lunch Chancellor David Jones provided an update on the Indian Residential Schools Settlement.

He reported that as a result of an agreement based on matching funds raised through Roman Catholic contributions to the residential schools settlement fund, 32 Anglican entities (the General Synod, the Missionary Society of the Church in Canada, and 30 dioceses) are expected to have a total of \$2,764,300 in contributions returned to them. The various entities would receive back an amount proportionate to their original contribution.

Therefore COGS may eventually have to decide how to direct the \$324,834 that the General Synod would be expected to receive back. The Chancellor said possibilities include treating the funds as general revenue or using it for something related to its original purpose, such as supporting the Anglican Fund for Healing and Reconciliation.

### **'An Indigenous Call to Church Leadership'**

Discussion resumed on the statement on next steps for Indigenous self-determination in the Anglican Church of Canada.

After discussions in table groups, several members of COGS shared their reflections on the statement and its implications.

An overall sense of appreciation was expressed for the statement and the relationship with Indigenous Anglicans it envisions, along with some mild apprehension about what that future might look like.

It was suggested that a group representing both the General Synod and ACIP be assembled to start discussion what a restructuring along the lines envisioned by the statement might look like.

“However this plays out,” said Bishop John Chapman, “it’s probably going to be a little messy. And that’s okay.”

Prolocutor Harry Huskins observed that the statement and what it envisions “is immensely important. In 50 or 100 years this moment is what historians are going to be looking back at.”

Bishop Larry Robertson, who has exercised most of his ministry among Indigenous peoples, said he was heartened by the direction of the statement: “One of the encouraging things is the origins of the paper. It comes from the heart and it comes from a need. I find that tremendously heartening.”

Some misgivings were expressed that Indigenous self-determination in the Anglican Church of Canada might result in a form of segregation of our communities.

However, Bishop MacDonald said the vision before them is of Indigenous Anglican communities who determine their future based “on the protocols and values of the local people.” He added: “It’s not like we’re going to set up something and then say to you guys, ‘Goodbye!’ When we say you’re our brothers and sisters, we really mean it. It’s not just rhetoric. We couldn’t leave you now if we wanted to.” What has been going on in terms of reconciliation and healing in our church has to continue to go on, Bishop MacDonald added, and this is one more step in that walk together.

In acknowledging some of the apprehension around the statement’s proposals Bishop MacDonald said, “It may seem like we’ve taken a step of power, but for us it was a step in reclaiming something that had been taken away.”

It was agreed that the proposals put forth in the statement need to become “a high priority for this Council.” It was agreed that the Officers of General Synod would meet with the Indigenous Leadership Circle to determine what next steps should be.

One suggestion was that when COGS takes up this question at its next meeting it does so using the “circular leadership” method common to Indigenous discussion and discernment. Canon Doctor noted that Indigenous Ministries may develop a resource on the method of circular leadership, not just for Indigenous communities but others who are moving adapt such forms of decision making. “It’s something we can offer to the wider church,” she added.

Bishop Mamawkwa concluded the discussion in prayer.

Primate: The document will be back here in the spring COGS meeting for further conversation.

### **Unfinished business**

The Council completed its agenda. There was a brief discussion about getting preparatory documents to COGS members sooner or at one time. The General Secretary noted that part of the challenge is the that some of the bodies reporting to COGS do not themselves meet until just prior to the Council, sometimes making deadlines for the reports difficult to respect.

### **Key messages**

- General Synod Pension Plan
- Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples
- Renewal of our commitment to end violence against women and girls
- The Primate’s homily at the eucharist
- We are moving more towards the “circle” way of holding our conversations

Dean Wall, on behalf of the Planning and Agenda Team, expressed thanks to the support of the General Synod staff and the leadership of the Primate, who concluded the meeting of the Council by inviting everyone to say the Grace.

*The meeting adjourned just before 3:00 p.m.*