

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Saturday, July 25, 2020

Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered together online at 11:30 a.m. EDT via Zoom conference.

Opening Remarks

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, welcomed members to the council meeting. She put forward a motion to approve the agenda, which was carried.

The Rev. Monique Stone, co-chair of the planning and agenda team, gave members a refresher on the video conferencing technology used for the meeting.

New General Secretary

The primate outlined the search process for the new general secretary who will take over following the departure of the Ven. Dr. Michael Thompson on August 31. She presented the Ven. Alan Perry as the nominated candidate and offered some details on his background.

Perry is currently executive archdeacon in the diocese of Edmonton, a position he has held for eight years, and a member of the General Synod pension committee. He previously served as a priest in parish ministry in the diocese of Montreal, and has extensive experience with General Synod and the Provincial Synod of the ecclesiastical province of Canada, as well as a passion for justice ministry and ecumenical relationships.

Archbishop Nicholls put forward a motion to accept Perry as the new general secretary, which

was carried.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod appoint the Ven. Alan Perry as General Secretary of the Anglican Church of Canada as of September 1, 2020, as nominated by the Primate and assisted by the search committee.

The primate thanked the search committee for their work under very challenging and difficult circumstances, and said Church House staff will spend some time considering how to orient the new general secretary as best they can.

Opening Prayer

The Rev. Louise Peters led an opening prayer.

Bible Study

CoGS broke into smaller groups for Bible study using the method of *Lectio Divina*, or "divine reading" of Scripture. A facilitator guided each group through three readings of Matthew 20:20-28, asking questions after each reading to delve deeper into the text and its meaning.

Members took a break from 12:30 p.m. to 12:45 p.m.

Dismantling Racism

Even before the global protests against racism that followed the killing of George Floyd in the United States, the primate said, both CoGS and the Anglican Church of Canada had been talking about racism. She cited as an example

the work of the group Black Anglicans of Canada, which had been holding weekly webinars on thinking about racism.

Though the primate had asked a small group of General Synod staff members to help her determine how to proceed with anti-racism work, she now believed that CoGS needed to empower a specific body to guide the whole church—a body that would include racialized people and council members. In this way, the anti-racism working group that CoGS had established in the past might be given new life as a task force for dismantling racism.

Reconciliation Animator Melanie Delva put forward a motion written by Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice to establish the dismantling racism task force, and invited questions from the floor. One council member asked about the theoretical background of the proposed group, noting that there were various theoretical approaches to opposing racism. Delva responded that the resolution was based on the baptismal covenant and the theory that “we are all God’s children.” In implementing its work, the group would be looking at different kinds of theories, tools and forms of organization to oppose racism.

The motion was put to a vote and carried.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod establish a Dismantling Racism Task Force with a mandate to:

- a) Review policies and processes to identify systemic barriers to full participation for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) in the structures and governance of General Synod and make recommendations for redress
- b) Update and promote the Charter for Racial Justice in the Anglican Church

of Canada

- c) Recommend a process of anti-racism education and training for the Council of General Synod as well as Coordinating Committees, Councils, Commissions and employees of General Synod
- d) Develop a plan to engage the whole Church in the work of dismantling racism, including identifying and/or developing resources and training to be offered to Provinces and Dioceses
- e) Report the results of its work to General Synod 2022, at the latest, including recommendations for ongoing work to dismantle racism within the Church.

Indigenous Ministries and ACIP

National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald offered an update on the work of Indigenous Ministries and the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, their major focus had been on preparing for the upcoming Sacred Circle. However, the spread of the coronavirus led to the postponement of Sacred Circle and a shift to addressing issues currently facing Indigenous people within their lands. The archbishop outlined a number of main issues that Indigenous Ministries are focused on:

- 1) Making gospel-based discipleship available through videoconferencing
- 2) Leadership training events to help lay leaders, especially in remote communities
- 3) Organizing youth events, which are “starting to get off the ground” with the help of Web Manager Brian Bukowski
- 4) Starting online gospel jamborees, which thus far have gone quite well. Two gospel jams have taken place and another is scheduled to take place on

Aug. 14. MacDonald said that the gospel jams had been helpful in creating a sense of connection and identity, and that many non-Indigenous people have taken part.

Now, he said, Indigenous Ministries was shifting focus back to the things that will provide “connecting points for Indigenous people in the life of the Anglican Church of Canada.” He noted the role of Indigenous Ministries Coordinator Ginny Doctor and Anglican Video Producer Lisa Barry in creating a series of podcasts on environmental issues and now one on racism.

The archbishop spoke about the significance of events since George Floyd’s death. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement and the increasing video evidence of systemic racism, Indigenous people in Canada have been able to see and understand some of the systemic inequities and brutalities that are built into the system of racism and criminal justice. There have been a number of reactions that have informed aspects of work by ACIP and Indigenous Ministries. A number of Anglican bishops, he said, have been involved in efforts to call attention to racial profiling in communities such as Thomson, Kenora and other places where “frankly, police brutality was an accepted part of Indigenous life.”

In both the United States and Canada, MacDonald said, the result of 200 years of racist and often genocidal policy had been exposed in the way in which Indigenous people and people of colour have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Many Indigenous communities have been hit hard because they have neither the resources to deal with the pandemic nor the capacity to import resources. As a result, they are extremely vulnerable to COVID-19—a vulnerability built into the system.

The resulting pain has been difficult to bear, crystallized by the deaths of significant individuals such as the Rev. Margaret Waterchief, who had died of COVID-19 the previous week at the age of 88. “We are all grieving deeply over her loss—a loss that is personal in that sense, but also exposes underlying vulnerabilities that our people face,” MacDonald said.

Indigenous Ministries is looking forward to ways in which different areas of work can inform one another, such as how Indigenous Anglicans can meaningfully contribute to dismantling racism. MacDonald said he was also encouraged by the enthusiastic response of Resources for Mission and other agencies of the church in helping Indigenous Ministries deal with new challenges and opportunities.

The work he had outlined, MacDonald suggested, provided avenues for a better life not just for Indigenous people, but for all in the Anglican Church of Canada. The fight against racism would result in a happier world for all, he said. “We are hopeful not just for the Indigenous community, but hopeful for everybody, and hope that in this pain and awfulness and sacrifice of life like George Floyd’s that we will see a new world. That’s what we’re hoping for and that’s what we’re working for.”

Members broke for lunch from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Election—General Synod Planning Committee

Deputy Prolocutor Judith Moses reminded council that General Synod 2022 was only 716 days away. She put forward a motion to adopt the terms of reference for General Synod 2022. The motion was carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod adopts the terms of reference for the General Synod Planning Committee 2022.

An election took place for two positions on the new General Synod Planning Committee (GSPC). One was for a member who had previously been a member of the GSPC 2019, and the other was for a member who was a representative of CoGS.

Nominees for the member from the previous GSPC were the Rev. Cynthia Haines-Turner and Ms. Laura Walton. Council voted to elect Haines-Turner to the position. The sole nominee for the member from CoGS was Luke Gobbett, who was elected by acclamation.

In the midst of the vote, Archbishop Nicholls confirmed that the chair of the worship committee for GSPC would be the Rev. Helen Dunn from Christ Church Cathedral Vancouver. Dunn was originally from Calgary, which the primate suggested made her a good fit for the 2022 General Synod taking place in that city.

Governance Working Group

Chancellor David Jones presented a report on the work of the Governance Working Group (GWG). At the last meeting, he said, the GWG had identified some of its priorities, the highest of which was to look at tiers for determining the number of clergy and lay delegates that each diocese elects to General Synod. Jones discussed background on how the process for electing delegates currently works.

Seeking guidance from council, he put forward five questions to help the GWG determine new sets of tiers it might propose:

- 1) What size should General Synod be? Should it be approximately the same size as now, smaller or larger?

- 2) Is it desirable to spread out the 20 dioceses that are currently in the bottom tier?
- 3) What should be the maximum number of elected clergy and lay delegates from each diocese?
- 4) What should be the minimum number of elected clergy and lay delegates from each diocese?
- 5) How many tiers should there be? Should each tier have the same width?

After a period of silence to ponder their responses, members answered these questions in a survey which remained open until the end of the meeting.

Key Messages

Members moved back into their smaller groups from Bible study to write key messages to the Anglican Church of Canada coming out of CoGS:

- Archbishop Mark has "significant hope" for Indigenous Ministries and ACIP.
- Indigenous church is showing the way forward.
- Dismantling Racism working group formed. Share that mandate with the church. We are expanding our work.
- Appointment of Alan Perry as the new general secretary
- Thanks to Michael Thompson and Ann Bourke for their service to the church.
- More from the primate's report and what she is doing during COVID.
- Update on the impact of COVID-19 in Indigenous communities and their response.
- Governance Working Group presentation: important work that we need to ponder and wade through the details, weigh the pros and cons, as these changes will impact future decision-making. More information

could be shared with wider church.

- Election of General Synod Planning Committee members
- Did Bible study over Zoom. Quote from Bible study: “You don’t serve God for the honour of it—you just do it!”
- Kudos to primate and national Indigenous Anglican archbishop for all the amazing things emerging from the Indigenous communities which are full of hope and hopefulness—not just for the Indigenous church but for the whole church.
- We continue to wrestle with the work of the church in spite of the pandemic, although we do so with the limitations of working at a distance.
- CoGS meeting more frequently may be a blessing and may be something we need to continue beyond the crisis. Not an either/or but a both/and. It allows the members of CoGS to connect with the work more often.

General Secretary’s Report

Archbishop Nicholls invited General Secretary Michael Thompson to make a report to CoGS, his last before Perry takes over as his successor on Sept. 1.

The outgoing general secretary said that Toronto was still not yet in Stage 3 of reopening after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, Church House was still not officially allowed to be open, through there is a protocol where people can come in and use the resources of the office when necessary. Thompson sensed a “weariness” in the management team, in Church House and in the Anglican Church of Canada as a whole, which underscored the need for staff members to take vacations. He noted that Church House was working with agencies to protect staff not in closed offices, in order to make sure workspaces are safe when the building opens

again.

Thompson anticipated that General Synod staff would continue to use the office only as necessary, since guidelines for wearing masks, social distancing and avoiding common areas would diminish much of the old “social circumstances” of Church House. He believed the whole church was facing similar challenges, and that the weariness he mentioned was related to figuring out how Anglicans could be together in a way that is safe. At the same time, the church is looking to retain many of the newcomers who found their way into its many online events and worship services.

Thompson commended directors and staff at Church House, and singled out the primate for praise in responding with creativity and imagination to the new reality. He highlighted a new awareness of the crisis in Indigenous communities and vulnerability to COVID-19, both in urban and remote areas. With increasing awareness of the wounds of colonialism and impoverishment in exacerbating COVID-19, Thompson said that at Church House, in the church and in society, there was a growing conviction that “we need to act on what we’ve learned in these days.”

Thanksgiving for Departing Members

The primate noted that two members of CoGS would be leaving after the present meeting. Vice-Chancellor Ann Bourke had decided to retire from this position after 10 years, along with General Secretary Thompson’s departure from his own position in August.

Chancellor Canon (lay) David Jones, who had worked closely with Bourke for the last decade, offered praise for the departing vice-chancellor and her contributions to General Synod and CoGS. Jones said that their skills and strengths were complementary and that he considered Bourke a friend as well as a “friend to all of us.”

A particular interest of Bourke's was the Anglican Military Ordinariate (AMO); she helped bring provisions for the AMO into the church constitution and helped develop the AMO's own internal canons. He noted that Bourke would continue as first chancellor of the AMO. Bourke thanked Jones for his "gracious" remarks and said that it had been a privilege to work with him.

Shannon Cottrell, executive secretary for governance in the general secretary's office, paid tribute to Thompson through a slideshow featuring photos of his ministry. Her presentation gave thanks to Thompson for his ministry and praised his talents for relationship and partnership building, organizational management, capacity for theological reflection, teaching, mentorship and "recognizing and upholding the gifts that others offer." The presentation noted the many positions he had held in his career, from parish ministry in three dioceses to principal secretary to the primate to a member of General Synod and CoGS, as well as his contributions to the *Anglican Journal* and as the primary writer of Vision 2019.

Prolocutor the Rev. Karen Egan, who had known Thompson for seven years through her work on the planning and agenda team, recalled her enjoyment in working with him and her admiration and appreciation for how the outgoing general secretary thought through every task he was given from a theological and vocational perspective. In the two triennia that Egan spent with Thompson on the planning and agenda team, they had worked on many major issues, chief among them the emerging Indigenous church and discussions around same-sex marriage. She praised Thompson's conviction that all voices must be listened to and all voices must contribute, calling him "a terrific teacher."

Haines-Turner also recounted fond memories of

her time working with Thompson on CoGS. She said that council would miss him; that the church has a "fuller heart" because of Thompson's ministry; that the lives of many have been enriched because of him; and that he can leave his position knowing that he has been a faithful servant of God.

Finally, Archbishop Nicholls shared some reflections on Thompson's work. She said that he had walked with the church through a period of great challenge and helped the church find its way to the current moment, having "handed it on in good shape." The primate thanked him and wished him well in his endeavours.

In his response, Thompson said he found the current moment "full of friendship and good work and people caring for each other." He had experienced much joy through the life of the church. He had travelled to many different places—not only geographical, but social and emotional places. As general secretary, he believed that he had engaged in the most difficult ministry of his life, through learning in-depth about the residential schools by attending the national events of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He recalled often difficult conversation about same-sex relationships and the ways in which the church had "turned towards and away from one another" over decades of discussions on that issue.

Thompson hoped that just as "our society is learning some things about itself through the apocalypse of COVID, that we will have learned something about ourselves" in the ways that the church must strive for compassion and justice. He thanked the council for its kind words, and thanked God "that I've had this privilege and that I've had such companions."

Acknowledging that Thompson had said he didn't want any gifts, the primate nevertheless

said he had a heart and passion for the healing ministry of the church in its relationship with Indigenous peoples. For that reason, she requested that if anyone wished to honour Thompson's work with the church, they should make a donation to the Anglican Healing Fund, which would support good work and "mean a lot to Michael and the Indigenous community."

Primate's Closing Remarks

The primate thanked CoGS for its patience and attentiveness. She said that the council would meet again on Sept. 12, when the new general secretary would be present and members would be able to welcome him.

Closing Prayer

Leading a closing prayer, the primate thanked Bourke and Thompson for their ministry and expressed hope to God that the work and consultation done at CoGS would strengthen the ministry of the church: "Fill us with your peace and give us courage for all that lies before us in its uncertainty, its challenge, joy and possibilities."

Council adjourned at 4 p.m.