

# COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Sunday, June 2, 2024

*Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered at 9 a.m. EDT at the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga, Ont.*

## **National Advisory Council Terms of Reference**

Dr. Ryan Weston, lead animator for Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice, presented draft terms of reference for a National Advisory Council on Dismantling Racism. General Synod in 2023 passed Resolution A200-R3, which directed CoGS to establish this permanent council in close consultation with the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples.

The mandate of the National Advisory Council on Dismantling Racism, as described in A200-R3, is to “conduct an initial and ongoing review of church structures, culture, policies, and practices pertaining to racism and anti-racism”; and to “develop and implement a national action plan to move from promoting diversity to living out full inclusion, equity, and belonging at all levels of the church (in both membership and leadership).”

After feedback from CoGS members, Weston prepared to amend the draft and return later in the day with a motion for council to vote on.

## **Anglican Voices for Just Peace: Palestine and Israel**

Dr. Andrea Mann, Global Relations director, offered a prayer for people of all faiths including Jews, Muslims and Christians in the midst of pain, trauma, violence and fear in the

Holy Land. She provided an update on the church’s efforts to seek peace with justice for all in Palestine and Israel. Both the Anglican Church of Canada and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) had reaffirmed their commitment to this goal at the 2023 Assembly by passing Resolution A160.

In the midst of ongoing violence in Gaza, Mann said Anglican voices around the world and in Canada are calling for a just peace for Palestinians and Israelis. Whether through solitary prayer, prayer in parishes and wider communities, or participation in ecumenical and interfaith gatherings, Anglicans are “calling through solidarity and advocacy: enough. Stop the killing. Release the captives. Feed the hungry. Heal the sick and the maimed. Bury the dead with dignity. End the illegal occupation.” She referred CoGS to resources for action from the Canadian Council of Churches, KAIROS Canada and the Canadian Companions of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem.

Mann thanked council for their willingness to pray and to walk in the Gaza ceasefire pilgrimages. Part of a worldwide ecumenical movement calling for just peace in Israel and Palestine, the pilgrimages encourage groups of Christians to collectively walk 41 km—the length of the Gaza Strip—while calling for an enduring ceasefire in Gaza, immediate flow of life-saving humanitarian aid, release of all captives, ending all arms transfers to Israel and ending the occupation. “I thank you,” Mann said to all who had prayed and walked the Gaza ceasefire pilgrimage that weekend. “The people

of Gaza thank you.” She shared photos from the Anglican-owned Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, located in northern Gaza, to make the call for a ceasefire less abstract and show the real people and ministry affected.

Resolution A160 included a call for the Anglican and Lutheran churches to provide safe spaces for conversation in pursuing truth and working for a just and lasting peace in Israel and Palestine. A question of critical importance in this work, Mann said, concerns how Anglicans act in public conversation and advocacy. She quoted a statement by Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, from the Gaza ceasefire pilgrimage in Ottawa: “To do nothing is to be complicit.” How can the church hold Israel and Hamas accountable for their war crimes, Mann asked, knowing this will be shamed as antisemitic or Islamophobic? Mann asked CoGS for recommendations for those tasked with the pursuit of a just peace in Palestine and Israel.

In responses after table group discussions, Bishop of Qu’Appelle Helen Kennedy pointed to the benefits of having a contact person in the region, offering the example of her email correspondence with the Anglican Church in Jerusalem. Bishop of Central Newfoundland John Watton recalled Archbishop Hosam Naoum of the Episcopal Jerusalem, who asked for prayers for healing and reconciliation. The primate again recommended a book she had mentioned at the last CoGS meeting, *The Wall Between: What Jews and Palestinians Don’t Want to Know About Each Other* by Raja Khouri and Jeffrey Wilkinson. She stressed the need to view the violence in Gaza through the lens of “both/and” rather than “either/or”.

“Even if there’s a disproportionality that breaks our hearts, there’s suffering on both sides,” the primate said.

## **Partner Reflections #2**

The Rev. Canon Dr. Murray Still, CoGS representative to the Executive Council of The Episcopal Church (TEC)—the latter’s equivalent of CoGS—shared his experiences of the U.S. church’s members and governance. He described much opportunity to connect with Episcopalians of Indigenous heritage and noted that all business in TEC’s Executive Council is conducted in both English and Spanish, including worship. Many of the conversations he heard in TEC intersected with the experience of the Anglican Church of Canada, Still said.

In a reflection at the end of his second Executive Council meeting, Still had provided an update on what is happening in Canada with Indigenous communities, noting the avid interest of TEC in these journeys to self-determination. He also had good conversations about peace and global conflict with Episcopalians and sat in on a finance conversation around the Episcopal Church of Cuba, which was readmitted as a TEC diocese in 2018.

*Members took a break from 10:15 to 11 a.m.*

## **Eucharist**

CoGS held a closing Eucharist in the main chapel.

*Members broke for lunch from noon to 1 p.m.*

## **Partner Reflections #3**

Dorothy Patterson, CoGS partner to the ELCIC, spoke about her background. Born and raised in the Six Nations of the Grand River and still a current resident, she is a former nurse and nursing instructor. In representing CoGS to the ELCIC, she was grateful for the leadership of the primate and ELCIC National Bishop Susan Johnson in their respective churches. Nicholls and Johnson “continually exude grace,” Patterson said, praising their knowledge and

integrity. She saw the Anglican Church of Canada and ELCIC collaborating in major justice issues, such as their support for peace in Gaza and for better palliative care.

Patterson attended her first meeting with the Lutherans in March, finding they let her into the fold comfortably and quickly. She found one feature distinguishing Lutherans from Anglicans was the former's propensity to erupt into joyful, spontaneous singing during their meeting or on breaks. "They're not long hymns, just joyful words and they all seem to know it," Patterson said. "That's one thing I really found inspiring." She was also surprised when Lutherans asked her to be a member—not just to sit with them, but to participate fully and vote, for which she was very thankful. Though still on a learning curve at her last meeting, she said, she hoped to contribute more next time.

The Rev. Chris Bishopp, ELCIC representative to CoGS, thanked council for making him feel welcome and said Lutherans "are tremendously enriched by this full communion partnership." He described his whole experience at CoGS as a "time of God filling me with renewed hope." One of the first ways he noticed this at the current CoGS was through humour, when he found himself assigned to a table group with National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper. "Someone seated Chris Bishopp with Bishop Chris," he said to laughter from council.

Bishopp said he found hope listening to discussions throughout the weekend at CoGS, many of which are also familiar to the ELCIC. Examples include discerning the nature of diaconal ministry and responding to financial challenges. He found hope in how the broader Anglican Church of Canada is growing into a richer relationship with the Indigenous church, as well as the prospect of "Indigenizing Christianity". He found hope in Anglican work on dismantling racism and learning to become

a place of diversity and inclusivity. Bishopp expressed thanks and appreciation for Nicholls and the primate's support for Johnson, who herself would be retiring the following year.

### **Liturgical Advisory Committee (cont'd)**

The Rev. Dr. Eileen Scully, director of Faith, Worship and Ministry, presented a snapshot of results from the survey she had asked CoGS to fill out on behalf of the Liturgical Advisory Committee. The 23 respondents shared experiences such as their own jobs, the spoken languages and racial makeup of their local and worship communities, the liturgical texts they use to worship, whether their parish has a worship planning team, who is seen most regularly in worship leadership as officiants/presiders, and their top priorities for national liturgical development.

### **National Advisory Council Terms of Reference (cont'd)**

Weston returned with an updated draft of his terms of reference for the National Advisory Council on Dismantling Racism and a motion to adopt them, which carried.

#### **Resolution**

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approve the terms of reference for the National Advisory Council of Dismantling Racism.

### **Financial Planning Process**

Prolocutor Canon (lay) Ian Alexander, Deputy Prolocutor the Ven. Tanya Phibbs and the Rev. Canon Dr. Stephen Fields presented a document offering some thoughts towards a proposed process for the 2025 budget and beyond.

They proposed creating a cross-sectional working group of CoGS and Financial Management Committee members to develop a

three-year financial plan for 2025 through 2027. This working group would report regularly to the Planning and Agenda Team (PAT), Financial Management Committee and CoGS; include key staff people and ensure connections with other relevant groups, such as the Primate's Commission.

They also suggested possible specifications for the plan, a possible work plan—specifying that working group consultations would begin immediately, working online—and tentative ideas for who might become members. The working group would then present a report to CoGS at its next meeting in November. A motion to adopt the proposal carried.

### **Resolution**

That the Council of the General Synod form a working group of CoGS members and Financial Management Committee members to develop a multi-year financial plan for the Office of the General Synod, with scenarios and options, that seeks to further the goals and aspirations of the Anglican Church of Canada, in the context of our best and evolving understanding of all available resources, along the lines laid out in Document 029-09-24-05, and bring a report to the CoGS meeting in November 2024.

### **General Secretary's Report**

General Secretary Alan Perry offered a quick report to CoGS, noting that members had previously asked in feedback to PAT for "fewer talking heads and more engagement." As a result, the planning team had set new expectations for presenting. Perry saw that the presenters had responded well and hoped CoGS members felt their concerns had been responded to effectively.

Perry recalled a conversation during Bible study at the current meeting on the distinction between good news and bad news. While the church proclaims the Good News about Jesus Christ, he said, members are also good at preaching bad news, often viewing the glass as "half-empty" when he believes the church is called to see the glass "half-full".

Though the church had heard some bad news at the present meeting, such as difficulties in the financial state of General Synod and not being as inclusive as it wished to be, Perry thought the church had also heard some good news. "Yes, we can do some work on our financial situation," the general secretary said, noting the proposal CoGS had approved minutes earlier. "And we will keep doing it. Yes, we can do some work to continue to dismantle racism and to work at being self-aware about our own complicity in microaggressions and learning strategies, both for helping ourselves to stop doing that and to intervene when we see it elsewhere around us."

He ended on a note of hope and encouraged council members to take back home the good news from CoGS, including memories of joy and celebration in the way it had honoured its departing primate. He thanked Nicholls for her leadership and CoGS for bringing their skills, talent and hope to the meeting of council.

### **Taking It Home**

CoGS members discussed what they would bring back to their own communities from the meeting. Main points included:

- Plan to communicate to each province
- Being clear about financial situation and why General Synod is worth investing in, connecting it to sense of hope felt at present CoGS meeting
- Anti-racism work
- Relevance and authenticity of church for

others to hear

- Daily highlights published on Anglican Church of Canada website

### **Closing Remarks and Prayer**

The primate said in her closing remarks that it had been a very good CoGS meeting. She thanked council for how it had engaged with the work, citing the way it had responded to new financial information and created a process to address the situation. "That's what CoGS is about," Nicholls said. "It's a working body. It's not just a 'listening to reports' body." She noted that General Synod empowers CoGS to be its voice between sessions; to act on its behalf and to take recommendations back to the next General Synod, where there are strategic decisions only the higher body can make.

Nicholls described a spirit of collegiality, friendship and working together at the present CoGS, along with the worship and music. She thanked CoGS for being church leaders in a challenging time. The primate said she left with a great sense of hopefulness for the church and what it can become under the leadership of whoever takes it forward: first Archbishop Anne Germond as acting primate until the next General Synod, then the new primate, working in partnership with the metropolitans and National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper.

After Nicholls led a closing prayer, Bishop of Central Newfoundland John Watton invited council to gather and lay hands on the primate for an additional prayer and blessing.

*Council adjourned at 3 p.m.*