

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Thursday, March 10, 2016

Council members gathered at 8:45 a.m. at the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga.

Eucharist

Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) began the last meeting of the triennium with a Eucharist service and homily.

Primate's Opening Welcome

Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, opened the meeting by offering words of welcome. He acknowledged the presence of Ms. Dorothy Patterson, member of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, and the Rev. Canon Laverne Jacobs, elder of Walpole Island First Nation, who were present the previous day with the Indigenous House of Bishops leadership circle for their meeting with officers of General Synod.

After listing regrets of council members unable to attend, the Primate expressed the appreciation of council for the work of Ms. Jane Osler and Dean Peter Wall, co-chairs of the Planning and Agenda Team. He also welcomed two representatives of church partners—Ms. Pat Lovell, CoGS representative for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and Canon Noreen Duncan, member of the executive council of the Episcopal Church—before introducing General Synod staff members in attendance.

Dean Wall provided an overview of the day's agenda, noting the meeting would be a busy one but had been designed with a fluid, flexible schedule. By the end of the meeting, he said, the Planning and Agenda Team would have the basic shape of an agenda for this summer's General Synod to present to CoGS.

Report from Marriage Canon Working Group

The Rev. Dr. Karen Egan, a member of the CoGS

working group on the marriage canon, provided an update on the group's work since the special council meeting in September to receive the report *This Holy Estate: The Report of the Commission on the Marriage Canon*.

Members of the working group engaged in telephone discussions before meeting face-to-face in January. At that time they were able to draft a report intended to go to the General Synod Planning Committee and CoGS to describe some of their best ideas on how to handle the marriage canon vote and subsequent discussions. However, Egan said, "sands have been shifting," and she provided the bare bones of a plan that may yet change.

Upon meeting, the working group first set goals and highlighted the importance of clarifying the rules of engagement before conversations begin on changes to the marriage canon. Group members believed it was important to hear as many voices as possible from across the church and have them feel safe in presenting, and that General Synod should be able to leave the meeting, regardless of its outcome, as a church whose members remain in communion with each other through mutual respect.

The basic plan of the working group is to set aside about an hour at General Synod to allow the Commission on the Marriage Canon to present their report again, since there will be some members of General Synod who have not yet had the report presented to them. It was suggested that members would then break into groups of approximately 20-25 people to begin conversations on some key questions such as:

- What is marriage? What does marriage mean for you now and has your

understanding of marriage changed over your lifetime?

- What is your greatest hope and what is your greatest fear regarding possible results of the General Synod resolution on changing the marriage canon?
- What are your views on the conscience clause, and is it sufficient?

The discussion over these questions at General Synod would take between 90 minutes and two hours, with the emphasis on sparking discussion with a diverse range of opinions.

The following morning, the same groups would meet again to discuss a different set of questions, centred on how we move forward as members of the church and the body of Christ after the votes have been cast and the situation made clear. Examples of questions on this second session might include:

- Some people will go home disappointed. What will the cost to you and your community be if that person is you?
- Can you see another way through this discussion? Is there a third way that we can begin to conceive of?
- Is there anything you still need to know or have to be able to vote on for resolution?

Under this rough plan, each session over two days would last the full morning. The third day, likely a Sunday, would not feature discussion of the issue, and the legislative process would begin on the fourth day.

Egan said that the recent statement of the House of Bishops on changes to the marriage canon must be taken seriously, and sessions were arranged at the present CoGS meeting to come up with new ideas and revise their recommendations. In the coming days of this meeting of CoGS, she added, council members might consider whether to make their own response to the House of Bishops communication.

Following the presentation by the working group, Chancellor David Jones reiterated the role of council at the present meeting. He re-stated the

terms of Resolution C003 from General Synod 2013, which direct CoGS to prepare and present a motion at General Synod 2016 to change Canon XXI on Marriage to allow the marriage of same sex couples in the same way as opposite sex couples, including a conscience clause so that no member of the clergy, bishop, congregation or diocese would be required to participate in or authorize such marriages against the dictates of their conscience.

The motion would include supporting documentation demonstrating broad consultation, explaining how it does not contravene the Solemn Declaration, confirming immunity under civil law and the Human Rights Code for bishops, dioceses and priests who refuse to participate in or authorize the marriage of same-sex couples on the basis of conscience; and providing a biblical and theological rationale for the change in teaching on the nature of Christian marriage.

In its report, the Commission on the Marriage Canon included a draft motion to present to General Synod. Jones added that while it is technically within the council's authority to change the proposed motion, he believed it was unwise to think CoGS could craft a different motion within a day or two that would meet all the requirements of Resolution C003.

He described the legal requirements for changing the marriage canon, which would include two-thirds majority votes in each of the Order of Bishops, Order of Laity, and Order of Clergy. Following the first reading at General Synod 2016, a second reading would then be required at General Synod 2019 before the resolution was accepted. He discussed the possibility of amendments, which would need to be made in writing, motioned and seconded before going through the Resolutions Committee.

Marriage Canon – House of Bishops Statement

Offering background information on the House of Bishops statement, the Primate recalled suggesting a special meeting of the bishops on the marriage canon report, similar to the special meeting of CoGS in October. Meeting in February, the bishops spent a long time in small group

discussions talking about the theology of marriage while taking into account the report of the commission. As reported in the statement, there was particular dismay and concern that the church had not broadly engaged the marriage canon report. There was a “lingering worry” among bishops, the Primate recalled, that a report that was produced for the whole church would be engaged only by General Synod delegates.

During their February meeting, the bishops wrestled with their position as representing a focus of unity for the church, each being bishops not only of their particular diocese but of the church of God as a whole. The moment it became clear that the resolution on changes to the marriage canon would not reach the necessary two-thirds majority in the Order of Bishops was a “difficult moment,” Archbishop Hiltz said, noting that some bishops were mortified and devastated, others quiet, and some satisfied. Mindful of their responsibility, the bishops issued the statement in good conscience to honestly advise the church about the situation, grappling with the specific wording.

“I know for some, you don’t want to hear me say this,” the Primate said. “But there’s an honesty about this statement that reminds me of the honesty of the statement that emerged from General Synod in 2010, and I think that’s important to keep in mind.”

A number of bishops then came forward and offered their own thoughts about the House of Bishops meeting. Underlining the high stakes of the resolution on the marriage canon, some bishops recalled talking to Anglicans who said they would consider leaving the church altogether if they disagreed with the final decision. Yet equally prominent was the determination to maintain a spirit of love and communion in the church, strong enough to weather any disagreement.

On behalf of the Planning and Agenda Team, Dean Wall called for afternoon sessions after lunch from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. to be held in camera to allow members to speak in candour. Members voted in support of the proposal before breaking for lunch.

Council members broke for lunch from 12:15 p.m. to

1:30 p.m.

Table Groups

Council members moved to in camera for a discussion from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. Given the communication from the House of Bishops at the end of February, the Planning and Agenda Team for the Council of the General Synod suggested to members of the Council that conversation be conducted in camera for two hours of their agenda today. This move was to ensure that members could process and work through the House of Bishops communication and to speak freely and without reservation.

Members took a break for coffee from 3 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

PWRDF Mapping

Council members removed their shoes and sat in a circle of chairs arranged around a giant map of Canada for an activity organized by the Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) to explain the Doctrine of Discovery.

The exercise began with Indigenous participants standing on areas inhabited by their respective tribes or nations. All council members then held a moment of silence for 41 seconds. Each second represented 1,000 years that Indigenous peoples lived on Turtle Island (North America) before the arrival of European settlers.

PWRDF executive director Adele Finney recounted successive waves of immigration, starting with the early arrival of Viking explorers and extending to later immigrants from Europe. With each wave of immigrants, non-Indigenous council members walked onto a part of Canada settled by their own ancestors. When all participants were standing on the map, they engaged in conversation with those surrounding them about their family backgrounds and the effects on Indigenous peoples in the area. PWRDF staff members spoke about the Doctrine of Discovery and the dehumanizing effect on Indigenous people of the idea of *terra nullis*, which wrongly held that the land on Turtle Island was empty when settled by Europeans.

After the exercise, participants spoke in small

groups about the feelings it had evoked among them, such as guilt and anger, and how they intended to apply what they had learned.

Council members broke for hospitality and dinner from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Financial Management Committee

Ms. Haroldine Neil-Burchert, member of the Financial Management Committee, offered a brief summary of the committee's work and presented two resolutions to council, which were both carried.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod appoint the firm Ernst & Young LLP as the Auditor for the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada Consolidated Trust Fund, and the Anglican Church of Canada Resolution Corporation for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2015 for the following fees:

- The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada: \$49,300
- The Anglican Church of Canada Consolidated Trust Fund: \$19,950
- The Anglican Church of Canada Resolution Corporation: \$8,350

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod authorize the Audit Committee to begin a formal Request for Proposal process to identify a recommended firm to be appointed Auditor for fiscal 2016 (after the completion of the audit of fiscal 2015).

Report from General Synod Planning Committee

A presentation by Web Manager Brian Bukowski on the new app designed for tablets at General Synod prefaced the latest update from the General Synod Planning Committee. A company based in

the United States created the framework for the app, which is designed for use at conventions. Bukowski demonstrated to council members how to use the app through a slide presentation, going through each of the sidebar icons on the app including Agenda, Maps, Attendees, Resolutions, Handbook of General Synod, Orientation Videos, and Elections. Using the tablets that will be provided to all General Synod members, delegates will be able to instantly access any information needed for the meeting.

Dean Wall explained that each member of General Synod will receive a tablet upon registration and then return it when they leave. Addressing the finances of tablets, he noted that the devices would reduce dependence on paper, photocopiers, machines, and the people needed to make these things work would. The final cost of tablets would be within the sum of money approved for General Synod, with the net amount estimated at approximately \$12,000.

Deputy Prolocutor Cynthia Haines-Turner and Chancellor Jones then presented a range of motions, which councils would vote to commend for consideration to General Synod 2016. The motions concerned work by the Social and Ecological Investment Task Force and Liturgy Task Force, dialogues with the United and Mennonite churches, Task Forces in Ministry and Theological Ethics, proposed amendments to Canon XXII and Canon XXIII, the Governance Working Group, and the Anglican Communion Relations Advisory Council.

Council members voted to commend each of the motions for consideration by General Synod. The vote on a separate motion, concerning proposed changes to Canon XXI, was held off until the end of conversations on the marriage canon the following day.

In his update on the General Synod Planning Committee, Wall said the committee was working away at the agenda for General Synod. Sunday, which falls in the middle of the schedule, would be led by Indigenous Ministries. The committee was looking forward to welcoming guests from Brazil and Cuba and subsequent evening hospitality. It

had also laid out significant time in the agenda for discussions on the marriage canon.

Each day of General Synod will begin with Bible study and end with some form of evening prayer. The agenda would include discussion of Council of the North work, and a legislative session in which much of the work before General Synod would be presented. Members would have the chance to hear from departments and ministries of General Synod, as well as people from the lower mainland of British Columbia and the diocese of New Westminster, which will be hosting General Synod 2019. To make sure delegates have enough time to discuss everything, the committee has left a half-hour of “flex” time each day.

With the worship committee and local arrangements committee both hard at work, registration for General Synod is now online and Wall encouraged members to register now if they have not already done so. Projected attendance is currently estimated to be approximately 325 people.

Council members then had an opportunity to ask questions. Responding to one query about younger participants, Wall said that youth members of General Synod would be gathering a day early to take part in a program being put together by staff to orient them and help them become even more active and involved in the life of General Synod. He added that he would be giving a more formal report with recommendations in the next few days.

Announcements

Following Wall’s report, General Secretary Michael Thompson announced that the first 31 pages of the report on assisted dying had been revised and posted, following a flurry of activity by Faith, Worship, and Ministry staff. Osler informed members that after an optional morning Eucharist, the council meeting would reconvene after breakfast the next morning at 8:45 a.m.

Night Prayer

Sister Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas, Reverend Mother for the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, led council members in evening prayer to close out

the day’s session.

Council members adjourned for the day at 9 p.m.