

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Saturday, March 13, 2021

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

Opening Prayer

The Rev. Louise Peters, chaplain to CoGS, led opening prayers.

Opening Formalities

Motions were brought forward to adopt minutes from the last meeting and to approve the agenda for the current meeting. A third motion slightly changed language from a resolution in February appointing members to the audit committee. All three motions were carried.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod appoint the following persons to the Audit Committee for the triennium 2019-2022:

- Mr. Phil Arthur, Chair—reappointment, and appointment as Chair
- Ms. Anne Brace—new member
- Mr. Peter Lewis—reappointment
- Mr. Paul Rathbone—new member

Primate's Opening Remarks

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, noted that the past week had marked one year since the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 to be a pandemic. At that time, CoGS

had been meeting with little awareness that the pandemic would still be raging a year later.

Many people have suffered loss after two waves of the virus and serious lockdown measures, Nicholls said. Now a third wave hovers on the horizon. One bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada is on leave due to long-term lingering symptoms from COVID-19. Nine older Indigenous clergy have died. "We have learned much about ourselves" and our communities, learned new skills and how to work in different ways, the primate said. She prayed for continued and deepening resilience, noting the growth of "Zoom fatigue" among many church staff members.

One thing Nicholls hoped and prayed is that "God is with us in the midst of each day and is patient with us—with our frustration, weariness, brain fog; inability to pray and ability to pray; with the creativity we've been able to produce and the lack of it." She reiterated the need for patience with the work of the church. "We will not accomplish everything we hoped to at the beginning of this triennium," the primate said. "But we will have accomplished different things and learned different things. I know God will be able to take whatever we can offer and weave it together for good, for in God we find all that is needed for whatever lies ahead."

The docket prepared for CoGS included public statements signed by the primate on behalf of the church. A clear lesson of the pandemic, Nicholls said, are the significant needs that have emerged, many of which are reflected in

government legislation. The Anglican Church of Canada is actively working—as part of coalitions such as the Canadian Council of Churches, and with its full communion partners in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC)—to speak out on issues and legislation. “One of the things that’s quite heartening in this time has been the willingness of government to listen to faith leaders ... to hear what we have to say about some of the significant issues happening around us,” the primate said. She noted two important bills coming forward in Parliament—one related to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the other to medical assistance in dying—and hoped the church would be part of those conversations.

A worldwide concern for the church is vaccine equity: making sure that COVID-19 vaccines are available globally, not just in countries with enough money and access to procure them. “This will be an ongoing issue in the months ahead,” Nicholls said. “Even if Canada has lots of vaccines, will we also advocate for those who don’t have access?”

Meanwhile, the church continues its work in other areas. The General Synod Planning Committee has started meetings to plan out General Synod 2022 and the Assembly with the ELCIC. Both the Assembly and the Lambeth Conference are still planning for in-person gatherings, though plans may change as the situation evolves. The primate concluded by congratulating Archbishop Lynne McNaughton on her recent election as metropolitan of the ecclesiastical province of B.C. and Yukon.

Updates

Judith Moses, chair of the nominating committee, presented two motions on appointments. Both were carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod appoint The Rev. Jonathan Rowe (ENL) and The Very Rev. Paul Smith (NS & PEI) to the Advisory Council of the Canadian Companions of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod appoint Canon (Lay) Ian Alexander (BC) as the Council of General Synod representative to the Ministry Investment Fund.

Bible Study

General Council split into breakout groups for 30 minutes of Bible study, during which they read and discussed Luke 10:1-11.

Members took a 15-minute break.

Strategic Planning Working Group

Judith Moses, co-chair of the Strategic Planning Working Group (SPWG), recapped takeaways from the CoGS small group discussions in February on strategic planning. CoGS members had reported being inspired by what they had accomplished so far as a council team in a few key areas:

- Faith: Big conversations—exciting. A beautiful body of Christ, learning about God from one another. Gift of gospel-based discipleship from Indigenous church. Eucharistic papers.
- Focus: Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP) work and self-determining Indigenous church. Commitment to anti-racism work. Governance Working Group (GWG) work, despite a muddy path. Communications tools, e.g. stunning last *Anglican Journal*.
- CoGS at work: A good sense of

community even with difficulties of online work. Meeting more frequently makes council business more efficient than traditional face to face.

Commitment of CoGS members to work together in spite of loss of personal contact. Remarkable work/creativity in midst of a pandemic—"we pivoted well."

- Process: New dialogue through listening groups—small groups culture expanding. Broader engagement/input to CoGS decisions from listening groups. National church insight/dialogue spreading across country. Local people know more what is happening in "the big Church". Inspiring big conversations across diverse backgrounds/places. Members have become a "bridge" between CoGS and their dioceses, "can tell people what is happening at the national level" and have modelled small groups.

Members also expressed certain concerns going forward:

- Will strategic planning process be on track to "land" with some specific directions?
- What will General Synod stop doing?
- Implications of the self-determining Indigenous Church?
- Potential clash on governance work with House of Bishops on General Synod representation?
- Representation work too focused on formula/numbers rather than whether we need to make fundamental changes to our structures; what outcome do we want?
- Concern that CoGS will lose energy post-pandemic
- Complex decision to go ahead with General Synod in 2022—will people attend?

- Sufficiency of depth of CoGS relationships on Zoom, especially youth
- Having hard discussions about finances and church's future; membership decline; how to make disciples (main goal of the church)?
- Tough financial realities to hit General Synod and smaller dioceses first?
- How can CoGS drive things forward? How do we communicate out?
- Limited understanding of the national church (CoGS and nationally)
- Is work done in working groups, committees, task forces being communicated out?
- Capacity of people to engage at the national level when local level life is so hard

Members identified certain areas of work that they are excited as CoGS to deliver to General Synod in 2022:

- ACIP Covenant and Way of Life, Jubilee Commission and self-determining Indigenous Church
- Grassroots excitement as strategy is communicated out
- To gather in person at General Synod 2022
- Engaging other voices in the broader church
- Dismantling racism
- A prophetic and authentic strategy that matters at all levels of the church

Running through all these areas was a common view by CoGS members that "COVID-19 has changed us—there is no going back to the status quo."

Moses also pointed to various "parking lot issues": tasks that may not be completed by General Synod 2022, but which remain issues of concern and will be addressed at a later date:

- Pastoral care and expansion of mission of the church
- Church must be present in areas that cannot afford us
- Closing of poor rural and urban poor parishes and ministry in prisons
- Safe Church work
- National church ability to “drive” issues such as environment and human trafficking—will they fall by the wayside?

SPWG co-chair Canon (Lay) Ian Alexander invited council to split into breakout groups for a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the church. He asked groups to consider what strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats they saw for the Anglican Church of Canada now and in the next few years.

Breakout groups spent 25 minutes in discussion before reconvening in plenary. Council members saw strengths in the church’s networks and connections, whether locally or nationally, and what use they could make of those networks. They saw opportunities in relationship-building and particularly how communications could become a catalyst for that. One group saw the biggest threat to the church as its public image, coloured by history, and that the church was little understood by the general public; conversely, they added, “our greatest strength is our people.” Another group identified the diversity of experiences in the church as a strength, but also a potential weakness in that it could make it harder to develop a common strategy.

Members took a one-hour break for lunch.

Covenant of Reconciliation (Call to Action #46)

Reconciliation Animator Melanie Delva directed CoGS members to an excerpt from the executive summary of the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report, which focuses on treaty-making and Indigenous ways of resolving conflict and misunderstanding. The TRC said that Indigenous ways of doing these things must be central to reconciliation.

When talking about making treaties and agreements in Canada, Delva said, government and church officials typically viewed treaties as legal mechanisms and as transactional, i.e. that Indigenous peoples were giving something up and receiving something in return. In contrast, elders and knowledge keepers suggest, Indigenous peoples approached treaty-making as a sacred obligation—one that committed both parties to respectful relationships and to share and care for the resources of creation equitably.

Delva said that the Royal Proclamation of 1763, issued by King George III, affirmed that Indigenous people had rights and Canada had to respect them. Indigenous leaders who negotiated these treaties often had clergy with them, sometimes Anglican. Oral history accounts suggest that because there were “sacred people of the Anglican Church” present, Indigenous elders believed that both parties to the treaties were engaged in a sacred relationship. However, Delva added, Canada did not consistently uphold any of the treaties, greatly damaging that relationship. The TRC has called for a “reset” of this relationship, embodied by Calls to Action #45 and #46 in their report.

Call to Action #45 calls on the Government of Canada to jointly develop with Indigenous peoples a Royal Proclamation of Reconciliation to be issued by the Crown. Such a document would build on the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaty of Niagara of 1764 and reaffirm the nation-to-nation relationship between the Crown and Indigenous peoples. Call to Action #46 exhorts parties to the Indian Residential

Schools Settlement Agreement—which include the Anglican Church of Canada—to “develop and sign a Covenant of Reconciliation that would identify principles for working collaboratively to advance reconciliation in Canadian society.”

This Covenant of Reconciliation, Delva noted, would be open to anyone: governments, civic organizations, etc. The Anglican Church of Canada is looking at signing this covenant. Delva had brought the covenant to the attention of CoGS as national church leaders to see what the conversation would look like in such a reset. Specifically, Delva asked: “What does it mean for us as Anglicans to seek relationships based on principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for maintaining relationships? What does it mean for General Synod 2022? ... What does it mean to enter this covenant of relationship [wherever] you are?”

General Secretary Alan Perry reaffirmed the invitation for the church to establish a new basis for the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Signing the Covenant of Reconciliation, Perry said, would build on steps already taken by General Synod, reiterating its ongoing commitment to reconciliation. In 2010, General Synod had repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery and endorsed UNDRIP. The question the church now faces, he added, “is how are we living into those actions?”

National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald made a number of points about the Covenant of Reconciliation. In modern church conversations, he said, a covenant is used to describe something deployed at a certain place and time. But in biblical and Indigenous thought, it is something that is thought to be eternal. First Nations viewed each treaty as just such an agreement, but many Europeans

historically did not.

The Covenant of Reconciliation, MacDonald said, “is not meant to replace the treaties. It is meant to clarify, enhance, extend and repair to the damage to the treaties.” The churches, he added, were “at the very least morally responsible, if not legally responsible in the treaties. First Nations would not have signed the treaties without the churches’ role.” Signing the TRC covenant would clarify the role of the church at an “implicit moral level”.

The churches’ failure in the treaties “raise the most serious questions we face as a church body, looking back at what happened historically,” MacDonald said. “Having made the treaties, how could we participate in dehumanizing a group of people so vigorously at a practical level?” Having baptized virtually all Indigenous people, he asked, how could the church “not only continue this process of dehumanization, but intensify it with the worst aspects of the residential schools? This not only raises a question about our moral integrity, but about our theological integrity.” The Anglican Church of Canada cannot sign the covenant, the archbishop noted, “without examining ourselves.”

Finally, MacDonald described the covenant in terms of repair and renewal. In the thought of Indigenous elders, the land is a “healing, living, family-making” ecosphere: “When you live in a place, you become family.” This focus on the land is manifest in many Indigenous translations of John 3:16 which read “That God so loved the land” —that is, God so loved the interactions of his creations within the ecosphere that God gave his only son so that humanity might live in a new way. Our baptism in Jesus, MacDonald suggested, points us to renew our humanity in reconciliation with all of creation and with each other. He described the main source of the early church’s appeal to outsiders as the love that

Christians showed to each other and to others who were outside their social or cultural group. "Their baptismal covenant was very clear, and I believe that's what at stake in this covenant for us," MacDonald said.

Delva concluded by praising the use of gospel-based discipleship by many Indigenous Christians. She invited CoGS to read the gospel of the day and ask for the Holy Spirit to lead and show them the message they are to receive in the context of the Covenant of Reconciliation. Council split into breakout groups and spent 20 minutes reading and discussing Luke 18:9-14. Reconvening in plenary, representatives identified some key points their groups had discerned:

- "Othering" that happens: church as colonizers have "othered" Indigenous baptized people
- Right relationships begin with right relationships with God and asking for God's mercy
- Trusting in God, staying on the road of our commitment, listening, respectful waiting and learning for the Indigenous voice to come through
- Right relationship is not a matter of ticking boxes, but hard work that takes you to a place of joy
- A call to action for our church. The government has "probably not done as much as we think they should have. It's up to us as a church—let's do something."
- The GWG hasn't wrestled with this issue on how we come together as a church.

The primate expressed her hope that the covenant would come soon.

Strategic Planning Working Group (cont'd)

Ian Alexander invited CoGS to build on the results of their SWOT analysis of the church

from earlier in the day, which had been emailed out to all members. Breakout groups spent 20 minutes in discussion answering two questions based on the SWOT results: What are the implications of these findings? What do we do about them? Members of each group took notes and sent them to the SPWG.

General Secretary's Remarks

General Secretary Perry reminded CoGS that they would be gathering again for their next meeting on May 7-9. Agenda items will include reports from committees, Safe Church, sexual misconduct policy training, and reflections from church partners.

"We will be meeting online again in May, but God and vaccine willing, we hope to be meeting [in person] in September," Perry said. "So we'll watch the progress for that and hope for a swift rollout of vaccines and end to the pandemic."

Closing Prayer

Louise Peters led the closing prayer. Primate Nicholls dismissed council with a blessing and wished members a blessed Holy Week and joyous Easter until they meet again in spring.

Council adjourned at 4 p.m.