

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Thursday, March 2, 2023

Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered together at 9 a.m. EST in the Best Western Toronto Airport Carlingview Hotel, for those attending in person, and via Zoom for those joining online.

Opening Eucharist

National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper gave the sermon at the opening worship service.

Primate's Remarks

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, opened the last meeting of the current CoGS by hearkening back to the triennial theme: "A Changing World. A Searching World. A Faithful God." When that theme was chosen in 2019, Nicholls said, few could know how prophetic it would become in the following months starting with the COVID-19 pandemic. The resulting quadrennium, given the one-year postponement of General Synod to 2023, had included its share of difficulties but also showed the power of God's love, the primate said.

The Anglican Church of Canada had changed cherished traditions as necessary to remain church; spoken up for the powerless, taken further steps in dismantling racism, and held itself accountable in the face of error. Anglicans had launched a listening process across the church for a new strategic plan. Through much change, God had been faithful and the church has seen the love of God shared in new ways, Nicholls said. "Despite our worst fears in 2020, the church survived and in some places thrived.

God's grace has been sufficient for us." The primate thanked CoGS members for facing the challenges of the quadrennium, finding new ways of governing the church, giving "more time than any council in recent memory" and working both online and in person.

Since the last CoGS meeting in November 2022, primatial work has focused on international work in the wider Anglican Communion. In December, the primate and National Bishop Susan Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) travelled to the Holy Land, visited Anglican and Lutheran bishops and local ministries in Jerusalem, and witnessed firsthand the deteriorating situation for Palestinian Christians and Palestinians in general. Nicholls cited an escalation of violence in recent days amid fears about a hardline right coalition in the Israeli government that is changing laws, redefining the judiciary, and "making life even more unbearable" for those living in the Occupied Territories, West Bank, and Gaza. Nicholls and Johnson heard from many Christian young people who are looking to leave the region.

The primate and ELCIC national bishop returned to Canada urging the federal government to speak out about these conditions. Both will make a trip to Ottawa with leaders of other Christian churches in Canada to meet with politicians and hold a panel on how Christians will respond to the Palestinian situation. Nicholls will also return to the Holy Land in May to accompany a pilgrimage of young Christians.

More recently, the primate spent three and a half weeks in Africa. U.K.-based charity United Society Partners in the Gospel invited primates to a meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on how to fight human trafficking and modern slavery. "All our churches" were involved historically in human trafficking and are being challenged for accountability, Nicholls said. Some leaders, including within the church, owned slaves in Canada. Nicholls hoped the church would continue work against human trafficking in Canada and with partners worldwide. The trip to Tanzania included a visit to Zanzibar.

Nicholls also travelled to Kenya through Nairobi and the surrounding area, meeting with the Anglican Church of Kenya's primate Jackson Ole Sapit and visiting two partner projects of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF). At a time when churches in Canada experience small congregations and few children, Nicholls said, it was "overwhelming" to visit churches in Nairobi where thousands of people attend Sunday worship services, Sunday school complexes are four storeys high, and buzzing activity includes many children, the Mothers' Union and a "joyful sense of presence of God". The Anglican Church of Canada can be proud of work that PWRDF does in rural areas of Kenya to improve the lives of dairy farmers, widows, and single parents, Nicholls said, such as providing shallow wells to provide clean water during prolonged drought. Meeting with some of these farmers, she described their inspiring energy and entrepreneurial spirit.

Finally, Nicholls attended the Anglican Consultative Council in Accra, Ghana in her capacity as regional primate of the Americas. The meeting occurred days after the Church of England held a General Synod, where its consultation on human sexuality had led to a motion to permit blessings of same-sex relationships—though the General Synod made clear it would maintain the traditional definition

of marriage. This development led to tensions at the Anglican Consultative Council, the primate said, exacerbated by significant misunderstandings on the relationship between the Church of England and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Nicholls said there had been much work both at the council and since to clarify that relationship. Still, she described the overwhelming feeling in Accra was one of being siblings in Christ, and that one of her great joys was seeing the diversity of the Communion. Despite statements from some primates in the Global South, Nicholls said, the Anglican Communion remains committed to walking together. "The Communion has not split," she said. Nicholls had endorsed a letter offering support to Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and asked CoGS to pray for him.

With the Anglican Church of Canada's own General Synod around the corner, Nicholls plans to catch up on work she couldn't do earlier during the COVID pandemic. Upcoming primatial visits include the consecration of Morris Fiddler as suffragan bishop for northern Ontario; worshipping alongside ELCIC National Bishop Johnson with a Moravian congregation in Calgary, as Anglicans and Moravians move into full communion together; a Saskatchewan clergy retreat, spending Holy Week in the dioceses of Yukon and Caledonia, the Ottawa panel, and Holy Land pilgrimage with young people.

The end of the 2019-2023 quadrennium represents the start of a new chapter for the Anglican Church of Canada, Nicholls said. As the Strategic Planning Working Group has prepared a new path forward, demographics show an aging and declining church and patterns changing in ordained and lay ministry. At the same time, the primate added, the church is seeing God at work in new and creative ways that invite Anglicans to take risks, try new models of ministry "with or without buildings",

and look into ways for parishes and dioceses to work together creatively. The Anglican Church of Canada is on the cusp of a new relationship with Indigenous people with the self-determining Sacred Circle “that will change all of us,” Nicholls said, even as work on reconciliation has revealed deeper systemic inequalities that need to be addressed. In the midst of these changing patterns, Anglicans are called to proclaim the gospel with joy, in rural and urban communities alike. “We have inherited much that is good and helpful, but can always be improved and transformed,” the primate said.

Reflecting on these questions, Nicholls cited a study completed several years ago that had not been acted on fully. She proposed the creation of a Primate’s Commission that would do background research, consult widely, and bring recommendations to CoGS and General Synod 2025. The commission would include theologians, clergy and lay people tasked with offering “creative, life-giving solutions... Some ideas might be ways to work within the structures we have; others might call for change... This is the moment. We need to seize it.” Details on this proposal would be presented in the CoGS docket later that day and members would have the chance to ask questions and make recommendations about the commission in the present meeting’s wrap-up session. The primate concluded her remarks by quoting Isaiah 43:19: “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” She reminded CoGS that “God is always at work, whatever that desert and wasteland looks like.”

In a further brief comment, Nicholls acknowledged an email received that morning from the complainant regarding former national Indigenous archbishop Mark MacDonald, who resigned in April 2022 due to acknowledged

sexual misconduct. Nicholls assured CoGS that work of reviewing General Synod’s sexual misconduct policy has been underway since a 2019 resolution asking for these policies to be reviewed. The primate said that comments of the complainant are being reviewed, and that she has had many discussions to clarify the church’s position and what has happened, to the degree she is able and taking privacy considerations into account.

Members took a break for coffee.

Community Building

The Rev. Monique Stone led a community-building exercise in which CoGS members gathered in pairs standing across from each other. One person would turn around and the other would change three things about themselves, after which the first turned back and had to guess what they changed. Afterwards, each pair joined up with two other people and everyone discussed the question: “How have I changed in the last four years?” Stone said CoGS would continue to have similar moments in the coming days to reflect on their time together.

Green Shoot Moment: Refugee Moment in B.C. and Yukon

Archbishop Lynne McNaughton, metropolitan for the ecclesiastical province of B.C. and Yukon, introduced the first “green shoot moment” of the meeting, sharing initiatives from across the country. She described how the dioceses of Kootenay, New Westminster, and Isles and Inlets each had an agreement with the federal government on refugee sponsorship, but came together to fund a one-year position to look at how the three dioceses could support refugees together and form other partnerships.

Brendon Neilson, executive director of the diocese of Islands and Inlets, offered further background on the project, which included a

working group to discern what refugee sponsorship for the dioceses will look like in 2024 and after.

Members broke for lunch from noon until 1:30 p.m.

Bible Study

Council undertook a *Lectio Divina* Bible study, reading Acts 8:26-39.

Dismantling Racism Task Force

Ryan Weston, lead animator of Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice, offered an update on the Dismantling Racism Task Force, established in June 2020 by CoGS. After meeting regularly for three years, engaging stakeholder groups, publishing interim reports; surveying dioceses on the extent to which groups including Black, Asian, and Indigenous people are represented in the church; and gathering feedback from CoGS, the task force put forward its recommendations, some of which will extend beyond the upcoming Assembly/General Synod. The latter work will consist of consultations with BIPOC (Black and Indigenous people of colour) Anglicans including a survey, anti-racism education for committees and councils, an anti-racism grant, emphasis on walking with the self-determining Indigenous church, updating the Anglican Church of Canada's *Charter for Racial Justice*, additional data gathering, and a new diocesan survey.

Weston also put forward three motions for CoGS to commend to General Synod. The motions concerned continuing the work of dismantling racism in the church; dismantling racism and faith formation; and a commitment to Call to Action #59 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. All three motions carried with general support for sending to General Synod, though some members expressed concerns. General Synod

will have the opportunity to discuss and amend the content of each.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod commend the motion on Continuing the Work of Dismantling Racism in the Church to General Synod 2023 for its consideration.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod commend the motion on Dismantling Racism and Faith Formation to General Synod 2023 for its consideration.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod commend the motion on Commitment to Call to Action #59 to General Synod 2023 for its consideration.

Members took a break from 2:45 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Assembly/General Synod 2023

The Ven. Tanya Phibbs, chair of the General Synod Planning Committee (GSPC), provided an update on the upcoming Assembly in Calgary with the ELCIC, which will include both the Anglican Church of Canada's General Synod June 27 to July 2 and the ELCIC's National Convention June 28 to July 2. Three assembly sessions are planned for both churches together, Phibbs said.

The ELCIC has decided to hold a hybrid in-person/online meeting, though they expect most delegates to attend in person. The Anglican Church of Canada, on the other hand,

has decided to hold General Synod purely in person, believing a hybrid meeting would not work well enough. However, all of General Synod will be livestreamed and everyone is invited to watch online.

The GSPC has also decided not to do electronic voting at this year's General Synod, with Phibbs saying it did not seem necessary or helpful given the cost. Sponsorships will hopefully again be part of General Synod, Phibbs said, though there may be fewer sponsors this year due to less display space and uncertainty after COVID. A visionary sponsor has been lined up and an announcement will be made at an appropriate time.

The primate said Bishop Anthony Poggo, secretary general of the Anglican Communion, planned to attend General Synod. Nicholls asked CoGS to pray for Poggo's visa to Canada, since these visas are difficult to obtain. The secretary general has begun the process and Nicholls was hopeful he would be able to join. Nicholls also noted leaders of The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will attend as part of the Churches Beyond Borders team. Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson said he was looking forward to having everyone in the diocese of Calgary for General Synod.

2023-2025 Standing and Coordinating Committees

Nicholls discussed the election of Anglicans at General Synod to standing and coordinating committees for the forthcoming CoGS. In finding members of these committees, she said, General Synod is looking at the whole church, starting with a vision of itself as a church of the body of Christ in which each member has a place. National committees include Communications; Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice; Faith, Worship and Ministry, Financial Management, Pensions, Partners in

Mission, and Resources for Mission.

In 2001, Nicholls reminded CoGS, General Synod passed a resolution encouraging members of under-represented and minority groups to be involved in these committees. Today, the primate said, many of these committees still do not reflect the diversity of the church. She asked CoGS to move into small groups to describe the diversity of each member's parish/diocese, who is missing from leadership circles, and how they might encourage greater diversity. They also provided feedback on the nomination forms. Among the responses of table groups were the need to be proactive, build relationships, learn what barriers might prevent people from joining committees, and find ways to advertise nominations more effectively.

General Synod Sessional Committees

Prolocutor Karen Egan presented a slate of people who have expressed willingness to serve on General Synod sessional committees, which only exist during General Synod. CoGS must vote on the slate. She described the work of each sessional committee and proposed members. Council members were given 24 hours to look at the slate, which they would later vote on.

Governance Working Group Housekeeping

Chancellor David Jones presented housekeeping motions on behalf of the Governance Working Group. After members expressed concerns about the first motion it was amended, and carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that this Council adopt the documents contained in A through E below for use at General Synod 2023, with the proviso that document C may be amended by the General Secretary to reflect the discussion at the Council.

- A. Nomination Form for Members of CoGS
- B. Nomination Form for Prolocutor and Deputy Prolocutor
- C. Nomination Form for Standing and Coordinating Committees
- D. Guidelines for the Resolutions Committee
- E. Guidelines for Writing Resolutions and Resolution Template

CoGS passed two further motions to General Synod, including one responding to General Synod 2019 Resolution C003 and another on language in Canon VI.

Pension Committee

Pensions director Rekha Menon and General Synod Pension Plan trustee Bob Boeckner presented motions on changes to the General Synod Pension Plan as well as the Continuing Education Plan. All motions passed.

Resolution

Be it resolved that The Council of General Synod approves the recommendation of the Pension Committee to provide a 2% benefits increase to all active members, inactive members and retired members effective July 1, 2023, in respect of accrued pensions as at December 31, 2022.

Resolution

Be it resolved that The Council of General Synod approves the recommendation of the Pension Committee to make the amendment to Schedule A of Canon VIII, as attached to the report in Appendix 1, effective July 1, 2023.

Resolution

Be it resolved that The Council of General Synod approves the recommendation of the Pension Committee that a 10-year guarantee be added to normal form of pension for single active, retired (including Quebec members that have already made an election), deferred vested members, with effect from July 1, 2023.

Resolution

Be it resolved that The Council of General Synod approves the recommendation of the Pension Committee to make the amendment to Regulation 7 of Canon VIII, as attached to the report in Appendix 2, effective July 1, 2023.

Resolution

Be it resolved that The Council of General Synod approves the recommendation of the Pension Committee to make amendment to Regulation 3 of Canon XII attached to this report in Appendix 3 effective January 1, 2023.

Boeckner noted that Philip Poole was stepping down as chair of the pension committee and that Bishop William Cliff of the diocese of Brandon was taking his place. "We'll miss Phil" as chair, Boeckner said, but the committee looked forward to Cliff as incoming chair.

Members broke for dinner from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Strategic Planning Working Group

Deputy Prolocutor Judith Moses, chair of the Strategic Planning Working Group (SPWG), and

SPWG member Canon (lay) Ian Alexander began their report with the Anglican Video clip on the first of five transformational aspirations, "Invites and deepens life in Christ", in the new strategic plan. Alexander said churches across the country have started to use Bible studies accompanying each transformational aspiration as Lenten resources, with Monique Stone sharing her experience of doing this at her church with another Ottawa parish. Moses recounted the strategic planning process from 2019 until the present, which included consultations with Anglicans across the country.

Janet Marshall, congregational development officer for the diocese of Toronto, spoke about pilot projects in different dioceses to test the aspirations, as well as to inform General Synod on ways it could support and serve dioceses and others nationally and internationally. The latter include convening gatherings, communicating, sharing stories, learning, and building links across the Anglican Communion. An example of one such pilot project is the new strategic plan for the diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, *Set Sail: Charting the Course for Christ's Church*.

Stone outlined the proposed agenda for discussing the SPWG at General Synod. The plan includes a road map/highlight document each General Synod member will have. One side of the document includes background on the SPWG and a mandala showing each of the five transformational aspirations. The other side has a blank mandala allowing General Synod attendees to reflect and write in how to live out each transformational aspiration in their own context. The purpose of the road map is to be something members afterwards can fold up and carry with them easily to talk in their home parishes about what happened at General Synod, rather than a larger document that would only end up on a bookshelf.

Marshall recalled a prayer that CoGS created three years earlier to help guide the work of SPWG. As the pandemic changed the context for strategic planning, she said, that prayer became a deeply meaningful way to centre listening groups as they engaged in reflective and respectful conversations about the future of the church. CoGS read out the prayer, and then Marshall invited them to renew the prayer. Table groups spent 20 minutes discussing how to pray for strategic planning work going forward, at the end of which the SPWG collected feedback to help create a new prayer in time for the closing Eucharist of CoGS.

The SPWG put forward a motion to commend to General Synod, which carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod send the following resolution to the General Synod:

Be it resolved that this General Synod:

- Receive with gratitude the report of the Strategic Planning Working Group.
- Adopt the five Transformational Aspirations to guide planning, priority-setting, resource allocation and collaboration with provinces and dioceses in the 2023-25 biennium.
- Direct CoGS to establish an implementation group.

Evening Prayer

Council concluded Thursday with evening prayer.

Members broke for the evening at 8:30 p.m.