

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Friday, March 3, 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.

Morning Prayer

After morning prayer, the Rev. Louise Peters, chaplain to CoGS, invited members to share their reflections on questions that would be put forward each day about their experience serving on the council. Peters would collect these responses and hand them over to the next CoGS.

Friday's question: "Name the one thing you feel was our best work on the Council of General Synod over these past four years."

PWRDF

Will Postma, executive director of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF), provided a brief overview of new and ongoing PWRDF projects and introduced public engagement coordinator Suzanne Rumsey, who discussed work engaging supporters and the public since 2019.

Rumsey identified four main ways that PWRDF's public engagement has evolved over the course of the quadrennium. First were biweekly "Praying with PWRDF" worship services that take place on Zoom every other Thursday at 1 p.m. ET and feature reflections from partners, clergy and volunteers. Dozens join each week and a "kind of parish has emerged of people from across the country," Rumsey said, with

some saying it was helpful during the pandemic. Public engagement also included dozens of educational webinars featuring partners and colleagues, discussing things like emergency response and support for refugees; Creation Care Climate Action, online and in-person learning modules that look at how climate change interacts with other areas such as gender and health; and "Mapping the Ground We Stand On", a virtual reconciliation workshop.

Postma discussed PWRDF's work internationally, such as efforts to alleviate hunger in Kenya and South Sudan which involve funding and supporting partners on the ground. He also spoke about PWRDF support for Indigenous communities within Canada, with programs often based around language and culture. Current projects include a Vancouver Island program to assist young Indigenous people starting businesses; supporting the Mik'maq community in Nova Scotia as it looks to reclaim artifacts from the Smithsonian; and a midwifery program that connects Indigenous midwives in Canada, Mexico and Peru.

Board member Cynthia Haines-Turner announced that PWRDF's board of directors had decided to change the name of PWRDF and formed a task group to that end. She described the move as an opportunity for PWRDF to emphasize and communicate better who they are as part of a faith group of the Anglican Church of Canada, and how PWRDF's work fits in with the mission of the church.

General Synod Sessional and Planning Committees

Prolocutor Karen Egan introduced two motions: one appointing members of sessional committees for General Synod 2023, and the other replacing Luke Gobbett with Chris Wood on the General Synod Planning Committee. Both carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that this Council of General Synod appoint the following sessional committees for General Synod 2023. [Slate prepared by Karen Egan]

Resolution

Be it resolved that Chris Wood be appointed as the representative of the Council of General Synod to the General Synod 2023 Planning Committee.

Members took a break from 10:10 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

All-Member Discussion

Following an email CoGS members received the previous day from the complainant in the case of former national Indigenous archbishop Mark MacDonald, who resigned due to acknowledged sexual misconduct, council members requested an opportunity to discuss the matter. Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, and Canon Clare Burns, former chancellor of the diocese of Toronto and a litigator who has taught at the University of Toronto and Western law schools, answered questions from CoGS on the church's misconduct policies, though clarifying that they could not respond to the specific content of the letter.

In a sometimes emotional discussion, CoGS members raised issues that included restorative

justice, confidentiality agreements, how the church's misconduct policies compare to other institutions, updates on the review of General Synod's sexual misconduct policy that began in 2019, the need for a trauma-centred approach, how investigations are handled, diocesan policies, and how CoGS might respond to the complainant's letter.

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

Gospel-Based Discipleship

National Indigenous Archbishop Chris Harper led a session of gospel-based discipleship with council reflecting upon Matthew 5:20-26, using the *First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament* by Terry M. Wildman.

Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples

Canon Murray Still, co-chair of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP), said in his report that ACIP's first order of business recently had been to raise up Chris Harper as the new Indigenous archbishop.

The process of selecting a new national Indigenous Anglican archbishop, Still said, was done in the manner set out in Canon XXII which guides Indigenous Ministries. ACIP, whose members were elected at the last in-person Sacred Circle in 2018 and which serves as the "Sacred Circle between Sacred Circles" (in the same way that CoGS serves as "General Synod between General Synods"), established a nomination and selection committee chaired by former Indigenous Ministries coordinator Donna Bomberry. The committee sent out letters to Indigenous bishops and clergy and ended up with eight names in response: four men and four women, with two clergy. The committee chose a top three, then returned to ACIP and made a case for their choice. ACIP unanimously chose Chris Harper. "By consensus, we made the right decision," Still said. The primate then

officially offered Harper the job. At this year's in-person Sacred Circle, Still said, members would have the chance to decide whether this process worked or if it should be changed.

Staffing challenges remain, particularly the need to replace late Indigenous Ministries coordinator Ginny Doctor—"We dearly miss her even today," Still said of Doctor, describing her as an "anchor"—and program associate Teresa Mandricks, who will likely retire from her role after Sacred Circle. Filling these positions will be a key focus for Harper.

Two major gatherings for Indigenous Ministries will take place in the coming months. First is a sacred gathering for young adults, which will take place May 1-8 in Beausejour, Manitoba at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre. The planned theme is "New Beginnings", which Still said aims to build off the apology for spiritual harm at General Synod 2019 and allow Indigenous young people to begin to recover some of what was lost due to colonization. Next is the in-person Sacred Circle from May 28 to June 2 at the Fern Resort in Ramara, Ontario north of Orillia.

Meanwhile, work continues from Indigenous Anglicans on various projects, such as the Jubilee Commission and ongoing work on justice and reconciliation. Dawn Maracle, reconciliation animator, has been working on the Covenant for Reconciliation called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Drafting the Covenant for Reconciliation brings together representatives from churches involved in the residential schools and the government. Each step in the drafting of the Covenant of Reconciliation has been brought back to ACIP for feedback, parallel to similar consultation in other churches involved. Still said the goal is for the Covenant of Reconciliation to be completed in the next year or two.

Indigenous Ministries continues to host online gospel-based discipleship on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at noon ET for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across the country. Anyone is welcome to attend, Still said.

Challenges remain in Indigenous communities, which are affected by COVID-19 and in some cases still undergo lockdowns. Bishop Isaiah Larry Beardy, suffragan bishop for the Northern Manitoba area mission in the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh, has described much trauma in his community including suicides from young people, Still said. "There is not an Indigenous person you will meet not affected by trauma," he added. Still described visiting hospitals in Winnipeg, where he receives calls on a regular basis from Indigenous people coming in with trauma. He recalled visiting local jails, estimating that 90% of the inmates are Indigenous, and the Manitoba Youth Centre, where he guessed 100% of the youth are Indigenous. Beardy's community in Split Lake recently experienced a terrible fire, Still said, and he urged prayers for communities facing those struggles.

Still described a conversation about suicide prevention with a member of the Canadian Red Cross in Winnipeg that had led to development of a three-stage program, with an estimated cost at the time of \$190,000. After Beardy asked how ACIP might be able to help his community, Still reached out to the Crisis & Trauma Research Institute (CTRI) and asked whether they might be able to go to northern communities and train people in trauma response. These conversations evolved into a plan to bring together 30 Indigenous and non-Indigenous Christians from different denominations, 15 from the south joining 15 from the north. With many Indigenous priests—most unpaid—reaching the point of burnout, Still said, this partnership with the CTRI offered

an opportunity for training of people to deal with trauma who could then go back to their communities.

Stage 1 of the project involves trauma response training in Winnipeg. Stage 2 will take place in August and involves delivering the program to communities. Stage 3 will involve evaluating the program and building resources as a church. PWRDF, Still said, was the first partner to “step up to the plate” and donated \$15,000 allowing ACIP to move forward with Stage 1. ACIP is also working in partnership with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Assembly of First Nations. Still calls the trauma response project “a joint effort for reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people”, which if successful could expand to other parts of Canada.

Bishop Joey Royal of the diocese of the Arctic described the experience of ministry in the north, which includes much pain, but also hope. There are many challenges in Arctic ministry given the vast size of the region, lack of roads, difficulty in communicating due to lack of infrastructure and many languages, as well as cultural differences, Royal said. Google searches about the Arctic will often bring up bad news, he added. With the church handling much of the load, the government recently said they would provide funding for churches to address community problems such as drug use. “But for many Christians in the north, faith and hope goes deeper than pain,” Royal said.

In small communities, being open to people and humble and willing to learn provides the “tremendous privilege” of being invited into their lives and ministering to them. Many people in the north experience faith in a very direct, immediate way. The diocese of the Arctic launched a deacon training program in January, partly online and partly in person in hub communities, which has 25 people enrolled at

the moment. Retired cathedral dean Jonas Alloloo, who helped produce the first Inuktitut Bible, is also currently hard at work on a revised second edition, Royal said.

Harper, in describing his perspective on taking over as national Indigenous archbishop, said the first thing he had to acknowledge was the need to be in a “place of healing”. He invited the wider church to walk with Indigenous people as allies, reiterating that the self-determining Sacred Circle remains part of the Anglican Church of Canada. The Indigenous church has much to offer the rest of the church, Harper said. “We know what it is to be connected to family where all are in close relation” based on a sense of community, he said. “We know what leaders are supposed to do and be, and that they are called and put forward to do important duties that many of us cannot.”

As national Indigenous archbishop, Harper said, he felt honoured to stand with the primate, general secretary, and all staff, being “incredibly honoured to stand and walk with my brothers and sisters who are all around with me. With their ministries, and ministries in the Anglican Church of Canada, we can do amazing things and we will do it together. Ministry is not about me. It’s about what we can do together.”

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

Jubilee Commission

Deputy Prolocutor Judith Moses, chair of the Jubilee Commission, shared an update on its work. The Jubilee Commission is mandated to “propose a just, sustainable and equitable funding base for the self-determining Indigenous Anglican church.”

Though its work had slowed amid some turnover and pending the approval of the new Indigenous archbishop, Moses said, the

commission is now fully staffed and work can proceed full speed ahead. There are three main streams of the commission's work: a historical archival research project, examining historic funding policies and trends in supporting Indigenous ministry; an assessment of current funding needs; and developing investment proposals for future support to the Indigenous church, Sacred Circle. Research is currently underway for the archival research project, with a draft interim report planned for completion in early May.

In establishing self-determination in financial management, Moses laid out a proposal for two new Indigenous-governed funds to be established within General Synod financial accounts. These would include a Sacred Circle Fund, with eight spending purposes or sub-accounts, and a 7th Generation Investment Fund to yield returns that would sustain the future Indigenous church. The Jubilee Commission has also identified potential sources of funding for Sacred Circle. Moses outlined design principles for Indigenous financial management, starting with achievement of "self-determination" as the core of reconciliation and healing and the overriding goal in building the Indigenous church, including governance of its finances.

The Sacred Circle Fund would be a new Indigenous-managed account within the Consolidated Revenue Account to support annual operations of Sacred Circle and its special initiatives. The fund would operate under Sacred Circle governance, policies, terms and conditions, and accountability frameworks. An ACIP financial management committee would oversee the expenditure framework, with the fund to be managed by the national Indigenous archbishop. Proposed spending purposes could include ministry development, including liturgical resources and translation; special projects or initiatives; training and

development; programming (e.g. youth, suicide prevention, healing); stipends, pensions and benefits; Sacred Circle governance including meetings, travel and support; emergencies; and research, especially the recording of elders' stories.

For the 7th Generation Investment Fund, which aims to make the Indigenous church sustainable into the future, the Jubilee Commission has proposed a new separate account within the existing Consolidated Trust Fund. An Indigenous advisory board would be established. The key source of funding would be diocesan tithing resolutions and unspent current year monies.

The Jubilee Commission recommended that ACIP and the national Indigenous archbishop work with General Synod staff to establish the proposed financial structures as soon as possible, and for a previously established committee on Indigenous clergy salaries to be reactivated on an urgent basis to address disparities on salaries of Indigenous clergy and bishops. It called for the early launch of a new Indigenous ministry fundraising appeal; and that conversations between ACIP, the Indigenous House of Bishops, the Jubilee Commission, and dioceses be held on the transfer of funds from sales of church properties to Sacred Circle.

Finally, it recommended that the mandate of the Jubilee Commission be renewed for the upcoming biennium, and put forward a motion to do so that 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 extend the Jubilee Commission's

mandate to the end of the 2023-25 biennium.

Reflections and Response

CoGS held a period of reflection in small groups about the afternoon's sessions, responding to two questions:

- How has this made you a more effective ally in this work as a non-Indigenous church member?
- What more do you need to become a more engaged and active participant in the work of reconciliation in our church?

In reportbacks, one table noted how while the church has learned to have difficult conversations, particularly for non-Indigenous Anglicans, there was still a concern that discussions might come off as judgemental. Another table said the afternoon sessions had given non-Indigenous members a better sense of what they did not know, making them better allies, while also recognizing that they need more information. They said using the *First Nations Version* of the New Testament for gospel-based discipleship was also helpful.

A third table praised the discussion on the National Indigenous archbishop and shift from a focus on jurisdiction to a place of acceptance and welcoming, and working from that. One CoGS member said it was important to hear from Indigenous people what they need, and another said it might help if half the members of the planning and agenda team for CoGS was Indigenous.

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

Consensus Decision-Making Discussion

CoGS reflected in small table groups on their experience of consensus decision-making over the 2019-2023 quadrennium, and what they

might recommend to the next council. Among the responses, many members said consensus decision-making was a good model that should be practiced, citing reasons of decolonization and biblical precedent. Others expressed reservations and said that while it is good to hope and work for consensus, to push for it is unnecessary and may cause problems; the main point should be making sure everyone feels heard.

Opinions differed on the use of different coloured cards to make decisions. One group that had been excited to do consensus decision-making at CoGS felt it wasn't used fully, with many simply using their green cards to vote. Some members doubted whether cards were even necessary, and that changing the layout of the meeting space might improve consensus decision-making. The pandemic was often cited as an obstacle to consensus decision-making, such as the hybrid form of meetings complicating things. Members of the online group wondered if Sacred Circle might be able to offer insight to CoGS on their own experience of the consensus model.

Strategic Planning Working Group - Bible Study

Basing Bible study around the transformation aspiration from the Strategic Planning Working Group, "Invites and deepens life in Christ", CoGS studied and reflected on the passages Matthew 22:36-40 and Matthew 28:19-20. Members looked back on their own baptisms and their journeys of discipleship, and considered how they and their parishes, deaneries and dioceses could live into baptismal questions and deepen life in Christ.

Evening Prayer

The day closed with evening prayer.

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