

# COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Sunday, March 5, 2023

*Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered together at 9:30 a.m. EST in the Best Western Toronto Airport Carlingview Hotel, for those attending in person, and via Zoom for those joining online.*

## **Orders of the Day**

The Rev. Louise Peters, chaplain to CoGS, asked the question of the day for members to respond to, which would then be sent to the incoming council. Sunday's question: "What is the one piece of counsel you would give the person who will be in your place in the next Council/biennial?" The Rev. Monique Stone read out the Orders of the Day.

## **General Secretary's Report**

General Secretary Alan Perry described the experience of the present CoGS as a "triennium of learning". In a largely comedic presentation, the general secretary offered humorous riffs on church acronyms and the names of dioceses.

He concluded by thanking council members for their work and asked them to pray for their counterparts in the next biennium, who will be elected in July at General Synod.

## **Partner Reflections**

The Rev. Canon Murray Still, co-chair of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP) and pastor at a joint Anglican-Lutheran congregation, presented his report as representative to CoGS of the National Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC). He outlined some of the current work of the ELCIC, including discussion

of 2SLGBTQ+ issues and perspectives on polyamorous relationships. Still also serves on the ELCIC's constitution committee, which aims to change gender terms in the Lutherans' constitution to better reflect current realities. He praised the leadership and experience of ELCIC National Bishop Susan Johnson.

As an Indigenous person, Still said, he felt supported and happy to give insight to the ELCIC on how the Anglican Church of Canada approaches Indigenous issues, especially through ACIP. Still is also involved in planning for the Assembly, which will mark his last meeting as Anglican representative to the National Church Council. He described it as a joy to sit with church partners and learn more about their tradition.

Liza Anderson, representative to CoGS for The Episcopal Church (TEC), said she had learned a lot at the current council meeting and always enjoyed discussions that TEC and the Anglican Church of Canada are having in parallel. She highlighted the conversation on diversifying leadership. Both churches are also having similar discussions about aging membership, church decline, "arguably institutional collapse." In this context Anderson has been thinking about the exhortation of St. Benedict to "hold death daily before your eyes." Though she had always considered this in individual terms, more and more she has been thinking about what it means for institutions, "recognizing that nothing we build is eternal" and that this can be a scary prospect. Anderson has served in three different monastic communities that have all

closed, and recently took monastic views as a solitary individual. She recalled asking herself: "If we take away all the emotional consolations of community life and economic security and knowing you'll be taken care of," and the only thing one receives from this exchange is God, "are you still in? When you phrase it that way, the answer can only be yes."

"Stepping into the unknown can be weirdly empowering," she added. The church as a whole is in a crisis of trust, she said, and described this as "well-deserved, because the church has hurt people"—not just through individual members, but through church structures. That crisis has been an ongoing struggle for Anderson. But she believed that most of those present had been on both sides: hurt by the church in different ways, and also part of structures that have caused harm to people.

Anderson ended with a lengthy quote by Italian writer Carlo Carretto pertaining to the Roman Catholic Church, but which she said resonates in any Christian context. In this excerpt Carretto expressed his ambivalent feelings about the church, describing its failings but also its holiness as Christ's church: "How much I criticize you, my church, and yet how much I love you!" Anderson described partnership with the Anglican Church of Canada for her as a great gift.

*Members took a break from 10:10 a.m. to 10:40 a.m.*

### **Eucharist**

National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper presided over the closing Eucharist. Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, delivered the homily.

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

### **Primate's Commission**

Nicholls opened the floor for feedback on her proposed Primate's Commission on Proclaiming the Gospel. Council members emphasized the need for the commission's mandate to be clear and understandable for all. They cited the need for theological diversity reflective of the wider Anglican Communion, and to include younger voices and listen to ecumenical partners. CoGS members put forward a motion affirming the formation of the primate's commission, which carried.

#### **Resolution**

Be it resolved this Council of General Synod affirm the creation of the Primate's Commission on Proclaiming the Gospel and commit to working together to see it launched.

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

### **Gathering Up the Threads**

Council documented what had happened at the present meeting and what they felt needs to be talked about going forward. CoGS members appreciated discussion of the larger Anglican Communion, hearing from Liza Anderson, and the contributions of Louise Peters in weaving worship in and out of the council's work. A member observed that the self-determining Indigenous church had come a long way and that receptivity in their view was much higher than when the work began.

CoGS commended the hard work of the Governance Working Group, the Pensions Committee, and the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee. They identified "a hunger for new ways of being CoGS" and the need for increased diversity both at CoGS and General Synod, which each member must take back to their own communities to bring others into the church's leadership bodies.

### **Closing Remarks and Prayer**

Archbishop Nicholls in her concluding remarks thought back to how challenging the early stages of CoGS had been after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the uncertainty and limitations of online meetings, the move to a hybrid format, and now meeting with a majority of members in person and only a few online. "I really felt the difference this time," the primate said. The work of the council had begun to gel in part because knew each other, had spent time and talked and prayed together. While it was unfortunate CoGS could not have reached that point earlier in the quadrennium, Nicholls said, she was grateful the council had reached it now because it provided an opportunity to leave with a sense of accomplishment and deeper relationships built.

The primate expressed her thanks to the Indigenous community, noting many challenging moments over the past few years. The emergence of the Covenant and Our Way of Life documents for Sacred Circle had been long anticipated. Within the House of Bishops and among many in the non-Indigenous part of the church, Nicholls said, there had long been a desire to move forward, to see on the ground what self-determination will look like and how the whole church can walk together. CoGS had now heard a more concrete expression of what that will look like, and Nicholls sensed much positive energy in the room.

Nicholls appreciated the gathering of wisdom for the next CoGS at the present meeting and was grateful for the conversation on consensus decision-making. She praised the council's work with the Strategic Planning Working Group on the five transformational aspirations: informing, participating in consultations, and sending that forward to the rest of the church. She thanked young CoGS members for sharing the challenges facing youth and lay members in

general, who often face competing time pressures such as secular jobs that can make it difficult to participate fully in church leadership bodies, and said council would continue to work on addressing these challenges.

Meeting largely in person at their current meeting, Nicholls said, CoGS had been able to worship, pray, and lament together. They had felt the pain of brokenness in the church together. But they also heard exciting possibilities for the church together. Members discovered new things about themselves and each other. This is what it meant to be God's people in community, the primate said: living together, laughing together, eating together, worshipping together, and discerning how to be God's people together. She profoundly thanked members for their willingness to engage and for General Synod staff members who had attended council. "Well done, good and faithful servants," she said, before leading CoGS in a closing prayer.

*Council adjourned shortly after 2 p.m.*