

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Sunday, May 9, 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 an opening prayer.

Orders of the Day

Cynthia Haines-Turner, co-chair of the Planning and Agenda Team, read out the Orders of the Day.

Covenant of Reconciliation Update (Call to Action #46)

National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald reported no updates on the Covenant of Reconciliation—a response to Call to Action #46 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada which was discussed at the last meeting of CoGS. Government and other organizations were planning to have a meeting on the covenant, but none has taken place as of yet. Once a text of the covenant is available, Anglicans will be able to seriously engage with the text.

However, Archbishop MacDonald was able to offer updates on the next meetings of Sacred Circle. The Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP) had originally planned a face-to-face meeting of Sacred Circle in 2020 to further discuss what the self-determining Indigenous church would look like, but the COVID-19 pandemic made such an in-person meeting impossible. ACIP has been working consistently on the Indigenous church. A focus group has

produced materials including a constitutional document known as the covenant and another, Our Way of Life, equivalent to bylaws or canons. The Indigenous House of Bishops leadership circle and ACIP have worked through these documents. Translations in Inuktitut and Oji-Cree will be distributed soon, with some materials already sent.

The current plan is for an online meeting from June 10-12 to work through the existing documents, which will then be sent out to home communities. A "penultimate document" will be brought back to another meeting of Sacred Circle in fall, during which a final draft will be presented. MacDonald expected that a copy would be available to CoGS by then. The subsequent hope, he added, is for a face-to-face meeting in June 2022 at which the final draft will be "sealed, fulfilled, and brought together in a Eucharist, in which it will become really a living document for the Sacred Circle."

Financial Management Committee

Hanna Goschy, treasurer and CFO, presented the report of the Financial Management Committee on audited financial statements of General Synod and the Consolidated Trust Fund. She reported a large surplus for General Synod, due chiefly to the pandemic reducing travel costs.

Total revenue for the year was \$10.5 million against a budget of \$9.8 million, with a \$700,000 surplus. The largest source of revenue was proportional gifts, contributing 86% of revenue. While several dioceses were under

budget for the 2020 fiscal year, some dioceses offered higher proportional gifts than planned. "Given the financial instability and uncertainty caused by COVID-19 through most of 2020," the committee's report said, "this was an incredibly generous outcome."

Goschy presented five motions to CoGS, all of which carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approve the audited financial statements of the Anglican Church of Canada Consolidated Trust Fund for the year ended December 31, 2020.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod appoint the following individual to Audit Committee from the triennium 2019-2022:

Mr. Stewart Burton – new member

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod receive the Performance to Budget Operating Results for the year ended December 31, 2020.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approve the audited Consolidated Financial Statements of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada for the year ended December 31, 2020, including net transfers of \$2,678,927 from Unrestricted Net Assets to Internally Designated Net Assets.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approve that dioceses be given a one-month holiday on proportional giving for August 2021 in recognition and appreciation for steadfast support provided to General Synod in fiscal 2020. This is to be funded from the Provision for Contingencies, if necessary, at the end of fiscal 2021.

MSCC

Chancellor David Jones explained that General Synod is one incorporated entity and Missionary Society of the Anglican Church of Canada (MSCC) is another. Thus a motion was presented and carried to adjourn CoGS in order to meet as the MSCC board of directors.

Two motions were put forward and carried by the MSCC board. A subsequent motion to terminate the meeting of the MSCC board of directors was carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Missionary Society of the Anglican Church of Canada approves the unaudited financial statements of the Missionary Society of the Anglican Church of Canada for the year ended December 31, 2020.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Board of Directors of the Missionary Society of the Anglican Church of Canada approves the unaudited financial statements of the Missionary Society of the Anglican Church of Canada for the year ended December 31, 2019.

Members took a 10-minute break.

General Secretary's Report

General Secretary Alan Perry began his remarks by noting his interest in photography. The key to taking photos, he suggested, is learning how to see—specifically, learning what the camera is going to see, because the camera is different from the human eye. “I think a lot of our spiritual life is about learning to see.”

In its latest meeting, the general secretary said, CoGS had been challenged to learn how to see something that is very obvious for people not in the dominant culture, but which may be less so for those in the dominant culture: the reality of racism. “We had some very moving revelations of those realities,” Perry said of Saturday’s panel discussion on dismantling racism. “I hope that we will all learn how to see those very difficult realities so that we can address them effectively.”

CoGS has also been invited to see what God has been doing in the pandemic, he added, “in ways that perhaps we’ve not been open to seeing because we’ve been tied up just trying to get through it.” Perry described *Surprised by the Spirit* as an invitation to the Anglican Church of Canada “to see what God is doing and will be doing.”

Reporting Back

Deputy prolocutor Judith Moses noted the importance of how CoGS shares information and keeps people connected to build relationships. She invited two council members, the Rev. Marnie Peterson and Chris Wood, to share how they brought information and insight from CoGS back to their home parishes and dioceses, and how the pandemic has affected that process.

Peterson stressed the importance of key

messages at the end of the meeting that members agree to report to their dioceses and provinces, which she described as “very helpful.” Typically Peterson will write a report with as many links as she can find to matters discussed by CoGS, and often preach about them.

She acknowledged that the pandemic impacted her ability to share information from CoGS at first, when she was “overwhelmed” trying to figure out how to be a priest in a pandemic. Since then, she has successfully found a new rhythm. Peterson also credited Randy Murray, communications officer for the diocese of New Westminster, for reminding her to share information from each council meeting.

Wood said he shares information and insights from each CoGS meeting with his parish, vestry and rector’s warden. A member of the diocesan council and executive council, he also disseminates information within those bodies. Typically Wood will write up notes beforehand on each day’s events, including slide decks and other resources if available. That information usually goes to the synod office, which shares it out to deaneries. He also shares CoGS insights with deanery council meetings.

The pandemic, Wood said, has actually helped improve communication in disseminating reports from CoGS. The use of video chat programs such as Zoom had made it easier to connect with people across the diocese separated by vast distances, who might not have been able to attend in-person meetings due to long travel times.

Key Messages

Council members suggested key messages from the present meeting that they planned to bring back to their dioceses and parishes. Key messages included:

- Greater understanding of the work and

dynamic relationships that the national church does on our behalf

- Encourage participation in *Surprised by the Spirit*
- Holiday on diocesan contributions—a way of “pushing the money down” to the ground, where ministry happens day by day and moment by moment
- Release of the General Synod 2019 minutes will cause reactions
- Work that continues around human trafficking and modern slavery
- Progress on Indigenous Church Covenant and Our Way of Life
- We are able to continue learning and growing in our work towards anti-racism, through listening to stories and our work as a council. Sensitivity is needed in dismantling racism.
- Perhaps unusually this time, three of the four metropolitans are members of CoGS. Are they able to be a conduit of information to the bishops and executive councils of the dioceses in their provinces?
- Increase in pensions
- Importance of remaining connected to national church and sharing important issues the national church is addressing, e.g. by reporting during meetings with archdeacons and bishops
- National church is doing valuable and needed work nationally and globally

Partner Reflections

Two representatives of the Anglican Church of Canada’s partners offered their reflections: Canon Noreen Duncan for The Episcopal Church (TEC) and Pat Lovell for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC).

Noreen Duncan

“It’s been a strange 14 months,” Duncan said to council members of the time since the

pandemic began. “I am completely vaccinated and pray you soon will be as well.”

Duncan said she had felt joy during the small group discussion following the panel on dismantling racism. “As some of you know—and I thank you for your patience these years—more than once I have used this reflection opportunity to inquire about the absence of dark faces in CoGS, in the leadership of Anglican Church of Canada,” she said. As the panel members opened their hearts to the council, Duncan had “wept with joy.” Yet after CoGS had adjourned for the day, remembering Martin Brokenleg’s story about Lakota Anglicans standing outside the front door of a church because only white people were allowed inside, Duncan had wept again that evening, “this time not with joy.”

Saturday’s Bible study on “wisdom above, wisdom below” from James 3 caused Duncan to remember Saint Monica—an early Christian saint and the mother of Saint Augustine, whose feast day was celebrated on May 4. The Romans called her “Monica of Africa”. Popular depictions of Monica in statues, paintings and illustrations present her as pale with flowing hair. Duncan pointed out that Monica, as a woman of north Africa, did not look like that. She compared these depictions to the white baby Jesus that Indigenous Ministries coordinator Ginny Doctor had described during her panel reflection. Augustine, too, she added, was falsely depicted as white. Monica, as the “patron saint of mothers who have troubled children”, is “significant to us especially today on Mother’s Day.”

The past 14 months had seen Anglicans and many others “waiting and praying and making new unexpected beginnings,” Duncan said. Even as many people are being vaccinated, in countries such as India hundreds of thousands continue to suffer, and the church prays for

them. Duncan expressed gratitude to Ryan Weston and Andrea Mann for their update on the church's continuing work with refugees and those who are trafficked. She believed that the church is in a hopeful place, and concluded by paraphrasing remarks from Ginny Doctor earlier in the weekend: "We won't be silenced. We're here, and we're not defeated."

Pat Lovell

Speaking on behalf of the ELCIC, Lovell continued to marvel at how well online meetings of CoGS are conducted, with rich and varied content, considering how "Zoomed out" members might be feeling much of the time. She expressed hope that they might be able to meet again relatively soon. "With so many people vaccinated, November looks promising," Lovell said. "I found *Surprised by the Spirit* to be a good way to reach out and share concerns and hopes for a brighter future," she added. "Even the website seems user-friendly to me."

Youth ministry was another highlight of the meeting for Lovell, who noted that young people embody the future of the church. The presentation by the youth secretariat offered hope for greater participation by young Anglicans at decision-making tables. It also showed the need for strong support for youth ministry in every diocese to keep nurturing the growth of youth leadership.

Lovell said the panel discussion on dismantling racism had left an impact. Panel members "bravely shared their personal stories of racist experiences. Their stories were profound and reflect work that still needs to be done if we are ever to dismantle harm done by systemic racism—not individual, but systemic." She described the listening groups as fruitful to help build relationships among each other, comparing them favourably to similar listening sessions in the ELCIC. Lovell stressed that such listening sessions are "not intended to be guilt

trips," but simply to express the realities of people's lives and provide opportunities to help right the situation.

The inclusion of dismantling racism in the church's strategic planning work will play a major role in helping maintain focus on this endeavour, Lovell said. The ELCIC and the Canadian Council of Churches are also engaged in anti-racism training and task force to try and eliminate systemic racism within churches. Lovell emphasized the need to find "sincere allies", because systemic racism is embedded in laws and practices caused by legacies such as colonialism.

"This cannot be the flavour of the month, or a reaction to George Floyd or Breonna Taylor or many, many others," Lovell said. "This has to be something that is a living and continuing fight for justice for all." She concluded by encouraging Lutherans, Anglicans, and all other churches to move forward with "faith and perseverance" in this fight for justice. "We must make progress if we're to survive as a society."

Two further reflections followed from Canadian Anglicans who work with the church's partners. Bishop Andrew Asbil is the Anglican Church of Canada's representative on the executive council of TEC, while the Rev. Canon Dr. Murray Still serves as Anglican representative to the ELCIC National Church Council.

Andrew Asbil

Since the fall of 2019, TEC's executive council has held nine meetings, only two of which have been in-person. Asbil has had the "joy and privilege" of being able to address the council on three different occasions and articulate how the Anglican Church of Canada is doing on behalf of Primate Linda Nicholls and CoGS. Two more executive council meetings are scheduled for June and October 2021, followed by winter and spring meetings in 2022. The October

meeting is tentatively set to be in-person, which Asbil found interesting. "In consultation with some other American bishops, they often tend to speak of the pandemic in a past tense, which is really interesting to us north of the border," Asbil said.

Going to TEC executive council is much like attending CoGS, he added. Members spend their time receiving reports, looking at financial statements, and thinking about the pandemic. Some highlights of the last nine meetings for Asbil have included listening to opening remarks from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry as well as Gay Clark Jennings, president of the House of Deputies. Elected in 2012, Jennings is the first ordained woman to hold that position. "The two of them always couch their opening remarks deeply in biblical and theological terms, always speak into the moment of what's happening around us in the world, and that tone sets the framework for our four-day meeting," Asbil said. "I always find those presentations powerful."

At the last in-person executive council meeting, which took place in Utah in January 2020, Asbil was part of a conversation about the continuing work of dismantling racism with an Indigenous focus, which bore similarities to work by the Anglican Church of Canada. He was moved by the re-admission of the Episcopal Church in Cuba back into TEC in 2018. He took heart from the extent of financial support for TEC, which reminded him that in Canada, "ministries in the future can be sown by the generosity of Anglicans today".

Asbil concluded by reading a statement in which the executive council re-affirmed a General Council resolution that TEC "condemns violent actions of authorities against people of colour", citing the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. Acknowledging the multiracial protests against

"racialized killings", TEC stated that "we as a church and as a society have failed to respect the dignity of every human being".

Murray Still

Still described it as a "privilege" and a "real joy to be able to work alongside the Lutherans. They ground their meetings in prayer and worship." One of the things that has impressed him are the land acknowledgements that can be heard not just at ELCIC meetings, but increasingly at church and secular gatherings in general. "Whoever's speaking ... tends to acknowledge which part of treaty lands they're on," Still said. "When we say as Canadians that we're treaty people, it means we have a relationship with the original peoples of this land." The ELCIC, he said, has consistently shown its commitment to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Meetings of the ELCIC National Church Council (NCC) are always well laid-out, Still said. National Bishop Susan Johnson had recently taken a sabbatical and reported on a book she had been writing, *Praying the Catechism*. The general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, Peter Noteboom, was present at a recent NCC meeting and "spoke well" of the ELCIC's contributions towards implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as its "intervention and letters concerning COVID-19." Lutheran bishops from across Canada reported to the NCC on their respective synods.

Like CoGS, the NCC has a strategic planning working group that continues to look at where the church is heading. Part of the ELCIC's current focus is on how God's grace "calls us to be an inclusive community that welcomes all and transforms the world." The NCC holds many small group discussions similar to CoGS, which Still appreciates for helping him develop

relationships with many Lutherans.

Tackling domestic violence is also a major concern for the ELCIC, Still said. He pointed to the Lutherans' embrace of Thursdays in Black, the campaign by the World Council of Churches to wear black on Thursdays as a means of bringing people's attention to the need to eradicate gender-based violence.

Closing Prayer

With the meeting's business finished, Primate Nicholls reminded CoGS that their next session will take place in June. That meeting will include significant work to advance the church's strategic planning process.

Louise Peters led council in a closing prayer and the primate sent members off with a blessing.

Council adjourned at 5:45 p.m.