

# COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Sunday, November 10, 2019

*Council members gathered at 9 a.m. at the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga.*

## **Orders of the Day**

Monique Stone, co-chair of the planning and agenda team, read out the Orders of the Day.

## **Partner Reflections**

Pat Lovell, partner to the Council of General Synod (CoGS) from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), delivered the first partner reflection. She expressed her appreciation for the opening remarks of Archbishop and Primate Linda Nicholls—which set the tone for CoGS—and for the racial justice discussion, the lessons of which she would take back to support anti-racism work in the ELCIC. Lovell also appreciated the relationship-building exercises, which were welcome in the midst of a long meeting. She enjoys attending CoGS and the fruitful relationship between Lutherans and Anglicans, and believed that positive relationship would continue.

Canon (lay) Noreen Duncan, partner to CoGS from the Episcopal Church (TEC), gave the second partner reflection. Duncan praised the contributions of National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald and the primate's opening remarks discussing the incorporation of the *Racial Justice Charter* into the church's work. She recalled the commentary of Canon Neil Elliot on the statistics of church decline, which Duncan said indicate to her that "as a denomination, as a church, we are not dying," but that the church must assess how it

continues.

On the issues of racism and reconciliation, she said, the Anglican Church of Canada has much to teach the rest of the Anglican Communion, the world and TEC. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has said that evangelism, care of creation and racial reconciliation are the three priorities for TEC. However, TEC's journey towards racial reconciliation is informed by the unique context of the United States.

The Episcopal Church's Executive Council met recently in Montgomery, Alabama, an important city in the history of racial reconciliation due to its prominent place in the U.S. Civil War and the civil rights movement. Among the topics discussed by the council was the connection between slavery, Jim Crow laws and contemporary mass incarceration. Duncan spoke to CoGS about efforts to free prisoners on death row, the majority of whom are men of colour, and the violence this demographic faces. Disproportionate incarceration and violence faced by men of colour are examples of systemic racism.

When the Executive Council met in Montgomery, she said, they worshipped at two Episcopal churches only half a mile apart. One was a small, historically African-American church. The other was a much larger, richer church with a mostly white congregation. This contrast, Duncan said, "is the reality of racial reconciliation" in the United States and in the Episcopal Church. The U.S. church is still trying to work out this mission, and it is not at the

same point as the Anglican Church of Canada when it comes to racial reconciliation. Duncan reiterated the point of Archbishop MacDonald that racism is a systemic, not individual issue. Dealing with racism is not an issue where “we call people names and then move on,” but where we recognize and understand its systemic nature and structures.

She recalled a conversation with a CoGS member who observed that the only two black people in the room at CoGS are “not Anglican, but Episcopal and Lutheran,” referring to herself and Lovell. “Let that sink in...CoGS needs to look in the mirror,” Duncan said. She recalled a quote from *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois, who wrote, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.” For a person not to see themselves as they are, but only through the eyes of others is indeed painful, Duncan said. “This is what internalized racial oppression is.” At one point during the meeting, Archbishop MacDonald had asked members to recall when they first encountered systemic racism. “Some people spoke quickly,” Duncan said. “But not me.” For her there was no one particular moment, but rather many different experiences.

Duncan noted that her church’s council now has some Navajo members and has become more diverse. While diversity itself has little to do with solving racism, it is a good start. “But until we work through the structures of how we got to this point, we’re not getting anywhere.... If we want to stem that bloodletting, we’re going to have to recognize that we have other kinds of people among us.” She reflected on Spanish-speaking parishes in the U.S. where many members of the congregations are immigrants or daily workers who “can’t even show their faces.” It is precisely among these populations where the church is growing.

Nicholls thanked Lovell and Noreen for their reflections. She underscored her hope that the council’s two partner representatives did not feel an obligation to go up and say nice things. “The whole point of reflections is to hold up a mirror and make us see what we might not see.... You’ve held up that mirror well for us,” the primate said.

### **General Secretary’s Report**

General Secretary Michael Thompson expressed his appreciation for Duncan’s contributions. He began his report by asking CoGS members to each take a moment and think about a time during the present meeting when they met someone they didn’t know and learned more about them, or encountered someone they knew and discovered new dimensions of their life. Thompson requested that council members write down a note of that person’s name and what they learned as they began or developed a relationship with them. Lastly, he asked members to reach out to that person between now and the next CoGS meeting and say what it was like to learn something about them.

The general secretary made this request because he believed that relationships would be key to this CoGS over the triennium. Council can make decisions better in the midst of its diversity and difference, he said, if members have relationships with each other and a sense of each other as persons, not as people with a discernible ideological bias. He recounted his own relationship with Archdeacon Rob Marsh, whom he initially met at a Bible study and later became a good friend he could reach out to if there was a crisis in his life. Such friendships, Thompson said, are important to the life of the church.

The current meeting marked Thompson’s 25th CoGS and his 17th as general secretary. His first took place in 2007, also the first meeting with Archbishop MacDonald as the national

Indigenous Anglican bishop and Archbishop Fred Hiltz as primate. Thompson reflected on how the church has changed since that time.

From 2007 to 2010, council had for the first time the voice of the national Indigenous bishop among CoGS. Members began to hear more clearly issues that had been talked about for some time, such as the covenant of 1994 and the longing of Indigenous people in the Anglican Church of Canada to have some sense of agency and self-determination within the church. 2010-2013 brought the first three years of Vision 2019 and the first joint assembly with the ELCIC.

2013-2016 was the first triennium in which council spent time grappling with the “vexatious issue” that had been placed in front of it through Resolution C003—tasked with placing a resolution before the next General Synod that would amend the marriage canon to allow for same-sex marriage. 2016-2019 was an “extraordinary CoGS, because it was then that we focused on living well with one another across significant difference.” He credited Bishop Lynne McNaughton, now a member of CoGS, with tirelessly working to help members stay in good relationship with each other as they wrestled with a highly contentious issue. “If the whole church could have had window into that process, I think the whole church would have been enriched by it.”

CoGS is now in a new triennium. “The work of living well across difference is not done, but it has changed,” Thompson said. “We find ourselves needing to continue that conversation, but without the pressure of legislative responsibility in relation to General Synod.” Council had heard very clearly over the past six years that the way Anglicans make decisions as a church must be renewed. The processes currently in place to answer difficult questions are often inherently divisive, since the

church’s constitutional language says that the way to decide a question is to vote on a question. To decide, he suggested, is often to divide, and there is no easy answer to this problem.

Behind this issue is the question of diversity in the church, which can be both “wonderful” and “alarming” for many at different times. Thompson referred to the book *Constructing Local Theologies* by Robert J. Schreiter, a leading theologian of reconciliation. Schreiter argues that catholicity first develops in the local church. As practices and understandings mature in local contexts, they come together in conversation and begin to approach something of a consensus. At some point, local contexts change—a process of renewal that leads to conversation with others and the emergence of a new catholicity. “Catholicity is not where we all agree, but an ongoing conversation.”

It is easy, the general secretary said, to be in a place where everyone thinks the same way or there is a single way to approaching faith in Jesus Christ. It is much more difficult for a community to gather out of diverse contexts and find ways to have a life in common that does not deny that diversity, but also does not result in a “balkanized church that has no collective life.” Achieving that goal, he added, is the work of this CoGS and General Synod itself.

If the church has learned something over the years in which Anglicans have struggled with how to understand same-sex relationships and sexual diversity in the life of the church, that may be how to live with one another in a way that is not a quest for supremacy, but for unity. Anglicans must continue in relationship with one another across differences that sometimes seem difficult to manage, but in a context where all are in communion with each other through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Over the next three years, CoGS will have conversations about crisis and hope, exploring different kinds of authority and how different ways of making decisions together as a church can honour the “extraordinary cultural diversity” within. Thompson sensed that the Anglican Church of Canada, though it may find that conversation difficult at times, would ultimately be enriched through this discussion about decision-making.

The general secretary described the work of Indigenous self-determination as an open-ended process. “The reality is that there is not a road map for self-determination,” Thompson said. “My sense is there may not even be a compass for self-determination. What we may have is a gyroscope for self-determination as a way of remaining on our feet, remaining oriented to one another in a way that we can be in relationship with one another. A gyroscope is a way of maintaining stability in the midst of great change around us.” In pursuing this goal, the church was entering uncharted territory, doing something that has never been done before. Thompson described this process as both “frighteningly un-Anglican and deeply Anglican”: frighteningly un-Anglican because it suggests structures that have served the church for hundreds of years no longer serve us, and deeply Anglican because such processes are how new structures have emerged in the church throughout its history. Out of this unchallenging and uncertain process, he said, “a new normal will emerge in the life of our church.”

Thompson thanked the members for their work as the council. Though he had enjoyed all of the councils he has experienced, Thompson sensed that the current council, “with the fewest returnees of any CoGS in living memory, has come together with a kind of confidence and sense of gladness about one another’s presence and participation in the life of this council, that

I’ve not seen in other councils.” He believed the diversity he saw in the council would be a gift to the Anglican Church of Canada as it moved towards a self-determining Indigenous church, contended with its own diversity, looked for “green shoots,” examined its own structures and governance, and turned towards the world with a heart for service and evangelism.

Wrapping up his report, the general secretary asked council members, as leaders in the church, to think of something that had changed for them, something they had learned or confirmed or been challenged on over the course of the meeting. He asked them to write that down, and hoped they would share it in the coming weeks with someone in their own context, connecting the local life of the church with its national life. It was a privilege, Thompson said, to sit before this council and with the new primate, and a joy to do this work.

### **Guest Reflection**

The primate invited Shilo Clark, a youth guest to CoGS filling in for absent member Sheba McKay, to address the council.

Clark shared some background on his relationship with the church. His first time attending Sacred Circle was with his grandmother, who was invited to the 2015 Sacred Circle by her brother and Clark’s uncle, now-bishop Sidney Black. Clark and his grandmother had heard about Sacred Circle and seen photos, and she was very excited—but at age 72 had never been on an airplane and was apprehensive about flying out to Port Elgin. Being “a lot more cynical” at the time, Clark volunteered to fly out to Port Elgin with his grandmother—in his mind mainly relishing the prospect of a free trip. But the experience of attending Sacred Circle would leave a far bigger impact on him than he ever imagined, aiding him in addressing issues in his own life.

"Sacred Circle and getting involved in the church through an Indigenous-led way was really what helped me," Clark said. He attended the next Sacred Circle three years later and began attending meetings of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP). When ACIP member Sheba McKay at the last meeting announced that she would be unable to come to CoGS, all eyes turned to Clark. After a moment of hesitation, he volunteered to attend CoGS.

As with the 2015 Sacred Circle, attending CoGS proved to be another "game-changer." Clark found council members kind, receptive and eager to listen to him, and he made many friends. He realized he had a voice and that it carried some weight. "Being here at CoGS has meant everything to me, and has given me hope and has instilled love...in my heart." He thanked the council for welcoming him and expressed enthusiasm at continuing work with young Anglican peers.

"We're emerging in the church, and it's a really exciting time for us because we do have that voice...that ability not to change the way folks think, maybe more [to] evolve the way folks think. That's what we're seeing right now—an evolving church." He planned to speak with his minister upon returning home about his experience with CoGS and work with ACIP, and to attend CoGS again in the future.

*Members took a break from 10:15 a.m. to 11 a.m.*

### **Closing Eucharist**

Council members held a closing Eucharist service with a homily by Archbishop Nicholls. In her homily, the primate spoke about both the challenges facing the church and the "conscious choosing of hope and God's path for us."

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

### **Strategic Planning Process (cont'd)**

Judith Moses, member of the Strategic Planning Working Group, presented council members with a summary of their table discussions from the previous days on the strategic planning process. She and fellow working group member Monique Stone had taken the results from those discussions and summarized the results in a thematic way. They categorized the hopes members had for the strategic plan into five different thematic areas:

- Hope-filled
- Risk-taking and transformational
- Realistic and sustainable
- Consultation, engagement and ownership
- Gospel-centred

Table groups spent 40 minutes in further discussion and recorded their responses to send to Moses, who with the working group would use them to help craft guiding principles for the strategic planning process.

The primate said that regular updates would be shared on strategic planning, perhaps through a possible webpage on the Anglican Church of Canada's website to help Anglicans follow the process. She also noted that the plan itself needed an exciting and "catchy" name. Archbishop Nicholls encouraged any creative minds to submit suggestions. Ideally, she said, the name of the plan would capture the spirit of discussions at CoGS over the previous days and encapsulate the theme of the triennium—"A Changing Church, A Searching World, A Faithful God"—in two words.

### **Member Reflections**

Beginning a tradition that would continue at each gathering of CoGS, the primate invited a few council members to offer their reflections of the meeting.

Marnie Peterson, who was attending CoGS for the first time and served as the first presider at worship after the primate, gave the first reflection. She modeled her reflection after a personal practice done at the end of every day.

First, she gave thanks: she was thankful for Noreen Duncan's address, for work on systemic racism and reconciliation, for the chance to get to know a wide range of people from across the church and study Scripture with them, and for the shift towards consensus decision-making. Second, she looked for evidence of the Holy Spirit, which she found in the primate's remarks, prophetic words from Archbishop MacDonald's sermon, hearing about ACIP and responses to the primate's apology for spiritual harm, learning to sing "Amazing Grace" in Cree, and being able to talk to General Synod staff. Third, she recognized her failures, such as not paying attention to the work of CoGS before now. Lastly, she prayed for the next day or what comes next. As members left CoGS, Peterson would pray for their safe travel home, for the work of General Synod staff, and for council members and all their congregations as they do the work of the church at this particular point in its life.

Margaret Jenniex gave the next reflection. Having previously been a member of CoGS, she had noted changes in the décor and resources of the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre. She was excited to share God's work at the meeting, and enjoyed Holden evening prayer and learning to sing in Cree. Opening CoGS with a smudging ceremony was a first for her, one that provided "a wonderful touch of spiritual cleansing." Table groups had helped her connect with people across the church and make new friends. Jenniex praised Hanna Goschy for making the financial report so clear, and Cynthia Haines-Turner for being an "excellent choice" to lead Bible study. She

thanked the national Indigenous archbishop for his "enlightening" sermon which gave her a sense of hope.

A major difference from her last time at CoGS, Jenniex noted, was that two-thirds of the current council are women. When she had last attended, the council was mostly men. Jenniex had learned that the church is changing, strategic planning is necessary in some form, and there is work to do, with many positive developments already taking place across the country. "Our people are waiting," she said. "God is waiting. We should leave here with excitement to do all we can with God's help."

The final reflection came from Bishop David Edwards. The latest CoGS meeting, Edwards said, reminded him of his first time attending General Synod in 2007, when he came away dazzled by the breadth and diversity of the church. Each subsequent national meeting had only made him more inspired and encouraged by that diversity.

The bishop named the work of Indigenous ministry as a highlight of CoGS. Because his home diocese of Fredericton has few Indigenous people in most Anglican congregations, learning about Indigenous ministry at CoGS—like other national church gatherings—provided him with a chance to take that information back with him and disseminate it across the diocese. Edwards also noted the remarks of Noreen Duncan that morning on racism, and he said he had been having similar thoughts regarding the lack of members of Afro-Caribbean or Asian descent sitting among the council. He believed the church needed to consider the implications of that.

### **Key Messages/Word to the Church**

As is traditional at the end of CoGS, members brainstormed and decided upon some key messages they wished to impart to the rest of

the church regarding the work and experience of the latest council meeting. For November 2019, these were:

- Strategic plan—underlying biases/foundations
- Conversations about systemic racism. United against racism—keep it at the front.
- Future of hope and joy, not despair.
- Impressed by Christian nature of everyone.
- Indigenous—vote as well as voice represented now.
- Sacred Circle 2020
- Practical help—resources for isolated communities
- Bringing Indigenous ways of being and teaching into the church, e.g. consensus circle model.
- Self-determination
- Seeing the vision of the elders come to life
- CoGS and ACIP both looking at structures
- Sacred Circle knows national Anglican Church of Canada behind us
- Hopeful because of youth. Partnership of Indigenous and non-Indigenous in our midst.
- With diminishing numbers comes new growth
- Seeing more women in leadership/hope in women leaders.
- TEC observer—CoGS lacks members of colour (aside from Indigenous members)
- Walking together with diversity
- Recognizing and honouring our spiritual ancestors, and gratitude for those whose work has brought us to this point.
- Beginning the work of new ways of decision-making—CoGS is modelling ways of working and being that are not divisive.
- We carried forward the General Synod

resolution brought forward by youth responding to the climate crisis.

### **Closing Remarks**

The primate thanked members for attending and being ready to engage with the work of CoGS. One of the things that happens at the first meeting of a new council, she said, is seeing how the group will gel. The planning and agenda team felt that the current council got off to a great start through its conversations and building of new relationships, which is very important in setting up a foundation for its work.

A key challenge of the council's work is the responsibility to share it with others. Archbishop Nicholls invited members in whatever context they are in to share the work of council, through means such as the daily highlights. She thanked everyone for their attention, gifts and the work that the council did together, and wished all safe travels home.

The primate concluded by leading CoGS in one of her favourite prayers from the *Book of Alternative Services*, the doxology at the end of the Eucharist, which she said "expresses where we are." Dismissal of the council followed the prayer.

*Council adjourned at 3 p.m.*