

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Friday, November 11, 2022

Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered together at the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga, Ont. and online via Zoom at 10 a.m. following an optional morning Eucharist.

Remembrance Day Morning Worship

The Rev. Louise Peters, chaplain to CoGS, led Remembrance Day worship that included the "Last Post" bugle call, standing in silence, and excerpts from the poem "In Flanders Fields".

Opening Formalities

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, welcomed Liza Anderson as the new representative to CoGS from The Episcopal Church and the Rev. Chris Bishop as the new CoGS member for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC).

CoGS approved motions to adopt the minutes of their November 2021 and March 2022 meetings as well as the agenda for the current meeting. The primate read into the record three previously adopted motions: for the appointment of Amal Attia as General Synod treasurer and CFO; for General Synod Pension Committee benefit improvements; and appointment of new members and alternates to the Anglican Consultative Council.

Safe Church with Mandy Marshall

The Anglican Communion's director for gender justice, Mandy Marshall, led a session on safe church that focused on trauma-informed approach and practices. Marshall defined trauma as invisible injuries, an imprint of pain

and chronic fear living inside a person. Causes of trauma might include a life-threatening event, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), chronic stress, an unsafe environment, being harmed by "safe people", or oppression based on factors such as race or gender. Emotional, physical, sexual abuse; neglect, discrimination, and poverty are all types of trauma.

Trauma can have serious impacts such as depression, anxiety, fear of authority figures, substance misuse, increased suicide risk, chronic health issues, and harm to brain development, Marshall said. In addition to biological, psychological, and relational harm, it can also have adverse spiritual effects: loss of faith, questioning where was God, existential crisis, distrust of spiritual leaders, and loss of hope or sense of purpose.

A key concern for CoGS must be its response to trauma, Marshall said, which she described in terms of the "four Rs": realizing trauma impacts, recognizing the symptoms of trauma, responding, and resisting by preventing future trauma. She listed principles of trauma-informed practices such as offering safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, empowerment and choice for those affected by trauma, and awareness of cultural, historical and gender issues. Marshall also pointed to concrete approaches for healing that include cognitive behavioural therapy, experiential therapy (role play, outdoors, music, animals), creative arts therapy, and mindfulness exercises.

In small group discussion, Marshall asked CoGS to consider what policies, procedures and structures need to change and what finances need to be allocated in order for this to happen. Council members pointed to experiences of trauma in their own contexts, such as Indigenous communities struggling with high rates of suicide. The session concluded with an exercise reflecting how to support those with trauma, in which Dean Peter Wall pretended to run a marathon and fellow CoGS members cheered him on.

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

Bible Study

Table groups studied and reflected upon John 8:1-11, in which the scribes and Pharisees say a woman caught in adultery should be stoned to death and Jesus responds, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

Primate's Remarks

The primate opened her remarks by acknowledging difficulties in the seven months since CoGS last met, starting with the resignation of former national Indigenous archbishop Mark MacDonald after allegations of sexual misconduct. Nicholls had heard the House of Bishops, staff at Church House, and members of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP) express disbelief, betrayal, pain, and sorrow in response. In her pastoral letter at the time, Nicholls had asked for prayers first for the complainant who had experienced harm; for MacDonald and his family as they deal with the notoriety that goes with resignation under such circumstances; and for the church, especially the Indigenous church. MacDonald's wisdom and leadership, Nicholls said, had guided the Indigenous church to the cusp of a new reality based on self-determination. "We remember his ministry with thanksgiving... That has not been

abrogated by his resignation," Nicholls told CoGS.

"We continue to be a church that takes seriously the call to be a safer church, where harassment and abuse cannot find home,' she added. To that end, the primate had invited Marshall to Canada for the past two weeks, which included meeting with the House of Bishops and a national gathering of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF); and visiting the diocese of Saskatchewan at the invitation of Bishop Michael Hawkins, after a planned visit to Tataskweyak Cree Nation fell through because of deaths in the community. Nicholls prayed that Marshall's visit and her seminar to CoGS would help the Anglican Church of Canada in its ongoing commitment to being a safer church, with bishops at their House of Bishops all committing to an ongoing review of their own safe church policies.

Nicholls recounted how more than a year ago, she had received a report into mishandling of an article prepared by *Anglican Journal* staff for the digital magazine *Epiphanies* on sexual misconduct in the church, which led to the resignation of two *Journal* staff members. The report included recommendations the primate said she would follow through on. The first phase of those recommendations is now mostly complete, Nicholls said. The general secretary, communications director, and *Journal* editor have met and discussed considerations for sensitive articles. The Rev. Karen Egan and Canon (lay) Ian Alexander, members of the strategic planning working group, have been working with the *Journal* editorial board on guidelines for editorial practice. Having received final recommendations, Nicholls said she looked forward to future conversations and opportunity to assess and review progress. The incident that gave rise to this process had been painful for many in the church, the primate said. "Our commitment is to make sure it will never

happen again.”

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic is not over, Nicholls said. “One consistent message I hope we as the church can continue to offer is a commitment to continue to look after the most vulnerable,” she said. “Masking in public venues as much as possible is surely the least we can do, yet it is seen by many as an imposition on freedom,” she added. We never know how vulnerable those around us might be, the primate noted, and the church continues to encourage vaccinations as one of the tools science has to offer us against the pandemic. “Let us love God and neighbour as self,” Nicholls said.

A major development since CoGS last met with the Lambeth Conference, in which about 650 bishops gathered in Canterbury, United Kingdom under the theme “God’s Church for God’s World”, after the conference had been delayed by four years. “You can be proud of the House of Bishops from Canada,” Nicholls told CoGS, with all deeply engaged in the conference, Bible studies, and building relationships. Youth stewards in particular, she said, had praised the Canadian bishops for treating them with respect and kindness.

Nicholls shared photos from Lambeth and recounted the experience. She drew council’s attention to a photo from the conference of 97 women bishops, which the primate has framed in her office at Church House—a dramatic visual expression of the increase in women bishops since the 2008 Lambeth Conference, where there were only 18. The primate recounted much laughter and joy from all bishops at the conference, and praised the greater prominence of Indigenous voices than in the past as well as the leadership of Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby in helping bishops learn to live with differences—referring to divisions over same-sex marriage. Lambeth also saw the

installation of Bishop Anthony Poggo as the new secretary general of the Anglican Communion.

Nicholls has now been elected the new regional primate for the Americas—one of five on the Anglican Consultative Council, which will next meet in February 2023 in Ghana. With the summer over, Nicholls said, the Anglican Church of Canada will renew its plans to move forward with the ELCIC in the two churches’ upcoming Assembly. She recounted her own recent travel, which included meeting with Pope Francis earlier this year for the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission in Rome.

As the church and the world continue to face the fallout from COVID-19, many clergy and bishops have reported profound exhaustion during a period of high anxiety and constant change, Nicholls said. She noted the planned resignation of Bishop Michael Hawkins due to his ongoing struggle with long COVID. With the Anglican Church of Canada still just beginning to understand the financial impact of the pandemic, the primate stressed the need to take a long view. Recalling a verse in Hebrews 12 from her ordination to the diaconate, she concluded, “We need perseverance. The race is not over. But we have the witness of scripture that God is with us, and there is a future and there is hope... May we encourage each other in that hope.” The primate expressed thanks to council for the “ministry you have done in difficult times as CoGS.”

PWRDF

Executive director Will Postma discussed recent work of PWRDF, which has included much work in and around Ukraine. Since Russia’s invasion on Feb. 24, Canadian Anglicans have given more than \$1.1 million to PWRDF to support those affected by the war, including \$360,000 in the first month alone, Postma said. “We were just so grateful for this funding,” he told CoGS.

PWRDF has worked with seven agencies not only in Ukraine itself, but in Poland and Moldova to help Ukrainian refugees. That work includes helping displaced families and vulnerable seniors; providing evacuation supports such as food and transportation; winterizing displacement centres for refugees to keep them warm during the colder months.

Other PWRDF relief initiatives have included support for those affected by humanitarian crises in Ethiopia, Iraq, and Jordan. Long-term development projects continue with projects such as supporting nurseries and empowering girls and families in Uganda; raising more than \$150,000 to support vaccine equity in countries like Mali and Liberia; and providing solar energy for clinics in Mozambique. Postma reported that PWRDF has received more than \$5 million in funding from Anglicans during the pandemic, supplemented with money from the federal government. PWRDF has worked closely with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank for programs such as alleviating hunger and famine in South Sudan. In 2022, Charity Intelligence Canada named PWRDF one of its top 100 charities.

Within Canada, PWRDF has worked with Indigenous communities to support projects such as Indigenous Birth of Alberta—a midwifery clinic run by the Rev. Lori Calkins, with PWRDF complementing funds from the diocese of Edmonton. Other programs in development include plans to partner with a Mi'kmaq community to urge the Smithsonian to return artifacts to the community's own museum in Nova Scotia, and plans to support the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh with a safe water program.

Cynthia Haines-Turner, PWRDF board member and representative to CoGS, said “you can see a real resonance” between the five transformational aspirations identified in the church's strategic planning process and the

work of PWRDF.

Members broke for coffee from 3 to 3:30 p.m.

World Council of Churches' Assembly

Haines-Turner introduced Anglicans who had attended the 2022 World Council of Churches (WCC) assembly from Aug. 31 to Sept. 8 and asked them to reflect on their experiences.

Bishop Riscylla Shaw, having attended both the WCC assembly and the Lambeth Conference, said both gatherings included daily themes and were aimed less at arriving at firm conclusions, but rather in striving towards goals together. “At the end of the day, I was reminded at both the World Council of Churches and Lambeth that as Christians we have a role in advocacy, moral courage, and informed theological reflection,” Shaw said.

Brendon Neilson, a lay delegate from the Anglican diocese of Islands and Inlets, focused on how the WCC assembly addressed concerns for people on the margins. Each day's plenary selected people to speak on the theme of the day and highlighted marginalized voices. Neilson and Shaw both participated in ecumenical conversations on the perspective of marginalized people and what a non-colonial perspective on the mission of God looks like. Proximity to power, Neilson said, is in many ways detrimental to faithful witness. “People at the margins are teachers and the prophets of the world today, and really the way forward,” he added.

The Rev. Canon Murray Still, co-chair of ACIP, discussed how Indigenous delegates from around the world had gathered at the pre-assembly and learned how they shared many of the same struggles regarding the effects of colonization. Young people especially were disturbed by the ways colonization had affected them locally. “Our youth were able to find their

voice... with the support and backing of the larger pre-assembly," Still said. The youth delegates were especially considered that the WCC be made aware the world is not just facing climate change, but a climate crisis. "Indigenous people have a way forward because we have lived off the land and can see the effect [the climate crisis] has on our own environments," Still said. He added that ACIP plans to have a new Indigenous archbishop by the year's end who would carry forward many of these concerns.

The Rev. Scott Sharman, ecumenical and interfaith animator for the Anglican Church of Canada, said he was struck by the cohesion at the WCC Assembly across denominations in areas that churches find of key importance such as anti-racism, opposition to Christian nationalism and white supremacy, and support for Indigenous people and decolonization. Sharman noted "how closely these mirror aspirations in our strategic plan." It was good to know these transformational aspirations are not a coincidence, he said, but that the Holy Spirit was moving in this direction—Anglicans are not carrying out this work alone, and different traditions can share their gifts with each other in achieving these goals.

Faith, Worship, and Ministry Committee

Eileen Scully, director of Faith, Worship, and Ministry (FWM) led the session on the FWM Coordinating Committee, which focused on the task force for ordinal revision. Based on a mandate from General Synod 2010, the work of the task force emphasizes changes in Anglican and ecumenical theological emphases that have grown over the past 50 years, especially baptismal ecclesiology and a deepening sense of mission discipleship. The task force includes a layperson, deacon, priest and bishop from each ecclesiastical province and is organized into working groups and is hoping for an in-person meeting in the new year.

A table group discussion ensued in which council members reflected on ordination services that were strong in their memories. Scully asked them to consider the key messages they retained from those ordinations, messages they took away about God's mission in the world and what God is calling us into in that mission.

The Rev. Kevin Flynn, speaking via Zoom, explained the theological foundations for ordinal revision. The initial approach of the task force, Flynn said, was that revisions would be conservative, not radical or substantive. He described baptismal ecclesiology as foundational for all understanding of ordained ministry, and said revisions to the ordinal would include explicit ways of celebrating our common baptismal covenant.

Ordination rites, Flynn said, should highlight the mission of God to reconcile all things in Christ. The community's life is a dynamic one of sharing and participation. Ordained ministry is to reflect the relational, interdependent nature of the church's life, in which there is no difference of value of persons before God. Language in the ordinal will be inclusive and reflect Indigenous practice.

Archbishop Lynne McNaughton said the task force would like to hear from small groups what should be in the ordinal rites. Ten minutes of discussion followed.

Scully presented an FWM motion to CoGS on officially recognizing the network of Anglican health-care chaplains and spiritual care professionals, which carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that this Council of General Synod welcome the initiatives of Faith, Worship, and Ministry in creating

networks to support local ministries, and recognize in particular the establishment of the Anglican Health Care Spiritual Care Professionals Network as an official ministry network of Faith, Worship, and Ministry.

Pension Committee

Bob Boeckner, trustee for the pension committee, shared highlights from the committee's report. These included the retirement of Judy Robinson as director of the Anglican Church of Canada's Pension Office Corporation and her replacement by deputy director and compliance officer Rekha Menon, who will take over as pensions director Jan. 1, 2023. Boeckner also cited an increase in benefits approved by CoGS. He presented a motion on the General Synod Pension Plan, which carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approve the recommendations of the Pension Committee to make the amendments to Regulations 7, 8, 9 and 12 of Canon VIII, as attached to the report in Appendix 1, effective January 1, 2022.

Members broke for open time and dinner from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Consensus Decision-Making

The primate said CoGS needed to consider what it would recommend on consensus decision-making going forward. She described scriptural foundations of consensus decision-making, such as in Acts 15, and its basic elements: listening, weaving different points together, and working peacefully through conflict. The use of red, yellow and green coloured cards to indicate levels of agreement and disagreement is often used.

Haines-Turner said this conversation about decision-making is one that continually comes up in the Anglican Church of Canada. People often come to General Synod, she said, to describe problems with the up/down, yes/no form of decision-making which they say causes acrimony and divides people into "winners" and "losers".

Donna Bomberry, ACIP member and former Indigenous Ministries co-ordinator, explained decision-making by consensus in Sacred Circle and Indigenous contexts. Sacred Circle uses small talking circles as well as plenary. "We strive to build community, and though we come from many traditions, nations, experiences, we try to be mindful and gentle with one another about inclusion of everyone's voice in the circle," Bomberry said. Rather than "debates", Sacred Circle members take the time to discuss each issue, share concerns with the larger group, reshape the question, and do further research. Each smaller talking circle when they report back to plenary has the chance to share their views. Elders are also placed in each of the small talking circles.

CoGS table groups spent five minutes of discussion thinking about experiences where they felt there had been particularly good outcomes following a consensus-style discussion—whether in the church, the workplace, families or communities. They reflected on what values seemed to be present in this discernment and what elements inspired effective decisions. Feedback highlighted surrender for the good of the whole, mutual respect, patience, civility, trust, non-hierarchical solutions, willingness to compromise, and all voices being equal—albeit with the views of elders carrying more weight because of their wisdom.

Nicholls said CoGS would continue this

conversation on consensus decision-making into its March meeting and its recommendations to the next council.

Financial Management Committee— Financial Statements

Prolocutor Karen Egan put forward a motion to change auditors to Norton McMullen, which she said came with a recommendation from PWRDF and which would result in a reduction of fees of about 66%. The motion carried.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod appoint the chartered professional accountant firm Norton McMullen as auditor beginning with the 2022 audit and forward.

Treasurer and CFO Amal Attia presented the audited financial statement for 2021. Revenue from dioceses that year was a bit lower than 2020, she said, in part because General Synod had given a holiday month for dioceses during 2021. But most dioceses had met their contribution. Overall revenue in 2021 was \$7.25 million, down from \$7.7 million in 2020. Excess of revenue over expenses was \$4.37 million, down from \$4.53 million.

While net income was “a bit on the low side compared to what we expected,” Attia said, investment income was much higher in 2021 at \$2.53 million, up from \$2.05 million. However, she also identified a drop in undesignated legacies from \$1.07 million in 2020 to about \$569,000 in 2021. Council passed a motion to approve the audited statements.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod approve the 2021 audited statements.

Attia also presented third-quarter financial statements ending Sept. 30, which she said were “in line with expectations.” A motion to receive the statements carried.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod receive the third quarter financial statements of the General Synod ending September 30, 2022.

CoGS Nicholls said it had been a challenging year for General Synod on a number of fronts, including changes in departments and staffing. She credited Attia with finding many ways to be more efficient and reduce costs, such as by changing phone systems and IT support.

A Changing Church Activity

Peters recalled the February 2021 of CoGS, halfway through the 2019–2022 triennium, before council extended its commitment for another year, identifying progress in its work up to that point. She invited members into a three-stage process to get reflections on their experience in light of the triennial theme: “A Changing Church. A Searching World. A Faithful God.”

In the first stage, she asked members to think of a word or phrase to describe how in the past three years, they had seen the work of CoGS respond to the theme “A Changing Church”. Responses from CoGS members included:

- Safer church
- Identifying “the way”—Indigenous church
- A shift to missional thinking
- ACIP—the drafting of the Covenant and Our Way of Life
- Sacred Circle—self-determination
- Liturgies for trial use
- Suicide prevention

- Jubilee Commission
- Zoom and online / adjustment to hybrid, increasing inclusiveness
- Dismantling Racism Task Force
- Acknowledging human trafficking
- New approach to planning—deep listening
- Trauma-informed
- Support
- Addressing challenges/uncertainty caused by pandemic
- Embracing the future with faith

Evening Prayer

The day's session closed with evening prayers.

Members broke for an evening social at 8:30 p.m.