

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Sunday, November 15, 2015

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

Joint Assembly 2019

Speaking to members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) of the Anglican Church of Canada (ACoC) and the National Church Council (NCC) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), General Secretary Michael Thompson introduced a discussion about the Joint Assembly between Anglicans and Lutherans set for 2019. He recalled a conversation with ELCIC National Bishop Susan Johnson about how full communion requires hard work, and cited the current joint meeting as evidence of the ways in which members of each church continue to make space for each other.

The 2019 Joint Assembly is likely to take place in the lower mainland in or near Vancouver. The choice of city is based on the fact that Vancouver will be the host synod that year for the ELCIC and it will allow the ACoC to break a recent pattern of hosting major meetings in central Canada.

Bishop Johnson invited CoGS and NCC members to have conversations in their table groups to help plan the Joint Assembly, encouraging those who attended the previous Joint Assembly in 2013 to say what they would do the same or differently, and for newcomers to say what they would want the event to be like.

After 10 minutes of discussion, table group representatives relayed their responses to the audience. A common theme was a focus on social justice issues. Groups cited the right to water discussion and the reading of the Joint Declaration in 2013 as highlights and suggested a public event at the 2019 Joint Assembly. One group spoke about the need for education on such issues.

Worship was another theme, with groups pointing to the importance of worshipping together through shared prayer and Eucharist services. The need to discuss challenging issues such as church structures and how bishops make decisions also came up.

Reflections

Various members of CoGS and the NCC took turns at the podium to reflect on topics of discussion from their respective meetings over the course of the weekend.

The Lutherans spoke about the strategic plan discussed at their national convention, which they had reviewed after hearing the Anglican baptismal covenant on Friday, modifying the language to include more references to justice and peace. ELCIC representative to CoGS Pat Lovell spoke about plans for their 2017 national convention and the shift after the 2019 convention from holding the event every two years to holding it every three years.

The Rev. Marc Jerry, chair of the Faith, Order and Doctrine Committee, discussed the committee's work looking at orders of ministry in the next biennium, which included questions such as the theory of vocation, and its plans to produce a study guide and white paper for the ELCIC. The Rev. Dr. Cameron Harder spoke of the Lutherans' work on physician-assisted death, which included a review and updating of its 1997 statement *Decisions on the End of Life* to reflect recent legislative changes, as well as plans for a new study guide in 2018.

NCC members also spoke about plans for the 12th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Namibia in 2017, which will reflect on the growth of the Lutheran church in the Global South,

and provided updated numbers on the Reformation Challenge to help celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation by planting 500 trees, awarding 500 scholarships, hosting 500 refugees in Canada and giving \$500 to the LWF Endowment Fund.

On the Anglican side, Dean Peter Wall summarized his report on the work of the General Synod Planning Committee. Bishop John Chapman related the discussion held for the Working Group on how to hold a conversation at General Synod on the possibility of blessing same-sex marriages. The General Secretary laid out the CoGS agenda for that afternoon. Hanna Goschy, treasurer and CFO, discussed her report on the 2016 budget. Bishop Lydia Mamakwa summarized the presentations on Indigenous Ministries—including discussion of Sacred Circle 2015 and the proposed fifth ecclesiastical province—as well as reports from the Council of the North and the Primate’s Commission on Discovery, Reconciliation and Justice.

Thanking CoGS and NCC members for their reflections, Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the ACoC, reflected on his shared gratitude with Bishop Johnson for the ability of Anglicans and Lutherans to meet regularly and worship together. He expressed the appreciation of Anglicans for the Lutherans’ commitment to walk with the ACoC as it strives to become a new church by partnering with Indigenous peoples in their quest for self-determination, and also thanked the ELCIC for their invitation to Anglicans to take part in the commemoration of the Reformation.

Council members broke for coffee.

Eucharist

CoGS and NCC members took part in a Eucharist service in the chapel at the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre. Archbishop Hiltz and Bishop Johnson presided, with the Primate delivering the sermon.

Taking advantage of the warm, sunny weather, the two church leaders led their members outside to gather around a tree which had been planted in the front yard of the facility some time ago. Bishop

Johnson said a prayer before she and the Primate watered the tree, an act rich with symbolic meaning as the two churches continue to grow closer together.

Council members broke for lunch.

Statement of Investment Policy

CoGS members heard a presentation on the investment policy of General Synod, including returns on its consolidated trust fund. Interest rates, which have been largely going down for decades, now look likely to increase by the end of the year. Meanwhile, the bond market, which has been considered a safe investment for the last 30 years, may be less so in the near future.

Proposed resolutions were put forward that would modify the church’s investments in line with changing market trends, expanding its approach into a market-neutral strategy and maintaining alternatives in real estate and infrastructure. Council members adopted each resolution by consensus.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod amends the Statement of Investment Policy as follows:

- For Bonds, reduce the strategic target to 30% (from 35%) and revise the range to 30%-75% (currently 30%-80%);
- For Market Neutral Strategies, increase the strategic target to 10% (from 5%) and the maximum of the range to 10% (from 5%);
- Replace all instances of “Market Neutral Hedge Fund” with “Market Neutral Strategies”

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod amends the Statement of Investment Policy Statement as follows:

- For Canadian Equities, reduce the strategic target to 22.5% (from 30%);

- For Foreign Equities, increase the strategic target to 22.5% (from 15%) and revise the range to 15%-60% (currently 0%-30%)

Physician-Assisted Death

The Rev. Canon Eric Beresford, chair of Task Force on Physician-Assisted Death, gave a presentation that offered updates on the task force and engaged CoGS members to help guide its work going forward.

Offering some background, Canon Beresford noted that in the late 1990s, he had engaged CoGS in the process that eventually led to the church document *Care in Dying*, which he described as “not without controversy, but generally well-received” as a contribution to the debate on physician-assisted death both in and outside the church, providing some helpful clarifications of terms.

While the document had concluded that a change in law would not be helpful “at this time,” it recognized both the diversity of opinions within the ACoC and, perhaps more importantly, the common values shared among those who may disagree on how the church should approach the issue of physician-assisted dying.

Those values included seeing life as a gift, not a possession; the dignity of human life; the importance of community and the role of care in that community; the need to recognize death as a part of life; the complexity of our relationship to suffering and the difficulty of speaking helpfully about suffering, particularly the suffering of others; and the importance of justice, especially with regard to the vulnerable. None of these principles or all taken together necessarily led to the conclusions drawn in *Care in Dying*, but the document represented a particular position and an invitation to further theologically informed conversation.

In the wake of the Feb. 6 ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada that struck down the previous ban on physician-assisted death, “We’re now in a

different place,” Beresford said. Though the task force was established long before the ruling as a priority at the beginning of the triennium, the Supreme Court decision nevertheless has a great impact on its work. As an aside, Beresford noted that the change in language from “physician-assisted suicide” to “physician-assisted death” arose from the desire for a less emotionally charged term.

As a result of the Supreme Court ruling, the law has changed. But the decision also left a series of unanswered questions in its wake, which will now spill into regulations related to the new situation. Beresford pointed to numerous implications of the decision, including:

- The definition of an adult. Multiple definitions currently exist in Canada.
- The question of stages of illness. If the court decision is simply read at face value, Canada will be the only jurisdiction in world where physician-assisted dying is available for those who are *not* terminally ill.
- How requests for physician-assisted dying are made in terms of assessing the genuine competency of patient, to verify that a decision is not being made out of depression or particular circumstances related to the illness or treatment.
- Will we require more than one physician to be involved as other jurisdictions do, or can you make a request for assisted death to a single physician?
- The issue of accessibility, which the Supreme Court did not address. It was clear that physicians have the right to not participate in physician-assisted death if it is against their conscience to do so. But the court was completely silent on what that means for patients who are seeking assistance for dying, but living in areas where physicians are opposed to this (not an insignificant problem, since the majority of Canadian Medical Association members are opposed to physician-assisted death).
- The implications for families, e.g. for insurance. In the decision of the court, the word “family” is never mentioned,

suggesting an understanding of the autonomy of the individual that is at the very least un-nuanced.

- No reference to issues of delegation of decisions by physicians and whether people can move across medical jurisdictions.
- The court decision seems to rest on a consumer view of the relationship between physician and patient, which is different from what the relationship between care provider and patient relationship has been historically and socially.
- Palliative care. In the process of hearings before the court, the issue of palliative care was dealt with and thrown out very early. Proponents of palliative care as opposed to moving in the direction of physician-assisted death were unsuccessful in making their case, because palliative care in Canada is spotty at best and often poor. Adequate accessibility to palliative care is an issue.

The Task Force on Physician-Assisted Death brings together Anglicans from across Canada with a range of expertise including medical practice law, palliative care, ethics, and nursing. While having its conversations by conference call has been less than ideal, thanks to additional funding it made a huge step forward in the fall with its first face-to-face meeting, which helped task force members consolidate where they needed to go and the issues they needed to address. After a call for submissions in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling, the task force received 30 submissions from Canadian Anglicans representing the full range of opinions one would find in Canada and within the church.

At the moment, the task force sees no need to revisit the *Care in Dying* document, which played an important role in setting the stage for the current debate. Rather, the task force is currently focused on writing reflections on theology, the pastoral process, and providing theological and pastoral resources. It is examining legal definitions and looking at areas of advocacy still remaining around the issue of palliative care, as well as issues of

potential regulation that may benefit from intervention.

With such a huge range of material for a relatively small task force, members have identified a set of priorities, which Beresford presented to CoGS members in the form of a chart labelled “The Priorities Pie.” The priorities, listed in no particular order, were:

- We need to engage our ecumenical partners’ desire for a strong statement;
- We need to re-articulate and hold on to our underlying principles;
- We need to advocate for workable guidelines that will be just and protect the vulnerable;
- We need to help people think about this issue theologically; and
- We need resources that support pastoral approaches that honour diversity.

Beresford asked CoGS members to imagine that they had one dollar and to determine how they would divide up that dollar among the five priorities. Members broke into their table groups to discuss how many cents they would allocate to each priority, writing down their responses which would go to the task force to help them identify the most pressing priorities.

Briefly summarizing their responses, table group representatives identified pastoral care and workable guidelines as their biggest priorities. Engaging ecumenical partners, though still important, was generally viewed as secondary to the task of enabling the church to first determine its own perspectives and response. Beresford thanked them for their help in facilitating the work of the task force.

Settlement Agreement

General Secretary Thompson presented two resolutions to CoGS members on the redistribution of funds related to the Amended Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. Council members adopted both resolutions by consensus.

Resolution

The General Secretary is authorized to return the funds to the Anglican Entities which were not required under the Amended Residential Schools Settlement Agreement as set out in the attached schedule.

Resolution

The amount returned to the General Synod will be used for the administrative costs of the Anglican Fund for Healing and Reconciliation, as determined by the General Secretary.

Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Discovery and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*

Ecumenical and Interfaith Coordinator Bruce Myers presented two resolutions to CoGS related to ecumenical initiatives. The first related to the church's response to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, while the second concerned the extension of the date of our response to the World Council of Churches document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

Council members adopted both resolutions by consensus.

Resolution

That this Council of General Synod affirm the proposal by the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith, and Order, that the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council 16 consider a resolution of its own indicating that the Anglican Communion affirms the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod direct the Coordinator for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations to prepare a draft

official response of our church to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* for consideration by the Council at its fall 2016 meeting; and further submit the final version approved by the Council to the Faith and Order Secretariat of the World Council of Churches no later than December 31, 2016.

Anglican Communion Relations Advisory Council

Prolocutor Harry Huskins provided an update on the work of the Anglican Communion Relations Advisory Council (ACRAC). He recounted how General Synod 2013 passed a resolution in which CoGS would offer a recommendation to the next General Synod on the proposed Covenant of the Anglican Communion, a response to emerging issues based primarily around Scripture that many Anglicans saw as causing divisions within the communion.

ACRAC thought it best to put a range of possible motions before CoGS that would allow members to choose the intent and wording of the motion to send to the floor of the next General Synod. The possible motions include directing that the present consultation process continue; neither adopting nor rejecting the Covenant; supporting part of the Covenant text, but rejecting another portion; an implicit, but soft, rejection of the Covenant; and a motion implicitly rejecting the Covenant.

CoGS members will be emailed texts of the possible motions, though the final text may not necessarily reflect any of them. Planning and Agenda Team member Jane Osler asked council members to review the possible motions, pray on them, and provide feedback to her team.

Nominating Committee Report

Deputy Prolocutor Cynthia Haines-Turner reported that no further nominations had been made to fill vacancies for positions on CoGS. Resolutions that council affirm the nomination of one member while forwarding the name of another as an appointment to the Financial Management

Committee were both adopted by consensus.

Evaluation and Key Messages

Taking a different approach to evaluation from previous CoGS, Osler presented council members with a sheet offering guidelines for a brief discussion. Noting that the present session of CoGS had eliminated the time associates spend with their coordinating committees and instead offered the Market Place session, it asked members to discuss the pros and cons of the new Market Place format relative to the time spent with their coordinating committees, as well as what they saw of value and whether it was something they would like to see continue.

Following the discussion, CoGS members approached the microphone to offer their thoughts on the weekend to determine the Key Messages of the latest council meeting. Among their responses:

- Worship was a key highlight, with messages, baptismal vows, and morning Eucharist really speaking to members
- Intentional and respectful conversation about how to have a conversation about a difficult topic
- The meeting was well-paced, with break times allowing members to feel more engaged in the time we did spend together
- Enjoyment of the time spent with brothers and sisters in Christ in the ELCIC and getting to know them. The Lutherans added much value to the meeting and help us laugh more. Re-emphasis that the two churches have far more similarities than differences. Desire to have two meetings per triennium together
- Appreciation of how much information was provided in packets ahead of time and how little that was referred to in the meeting. It proved a good use of time, in that CoGS wasn't reiterating reports members had already received.

Osler reminded CoGS members that the next meeting of CoGS in spring 2016 would be longer, lasting four days rather than three. The Primate

thanked the Planning and Agenda Team for its work.

Adjournment

The General Secretary led CoGS members in a concluding prayer before adjournment.

The meeting concluded at approximately 3:30 p.m.