

# COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Thursday, November 23, 2023

*Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered together at the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga, Ont. at 9 a.m.*

## **Smudging, Opening Eucharist and Commissioning**

National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper led a smudging ceremony using sage, one of the four sacred medicines.

An opening Eucharist took place in the main chapel. Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, offered a homily and commissioned the new CoGS.

*Members took a break from 10:40 a.m. to 11 a.m.*

## **Opening Formalities**

CoGS passed resolutions to approve the minutes of the July 2 meeting of CoGS and the agenda for the current meeting. They also passed a resolution confirming the appointment of Canon Clare Burns as the new chancellor, succeeding David Jones.

### **Resolution**

That the Council of General Synod appoint Canon Clare Burns as Chancellor.

## **Results of Email Ballot for Planning and Agenda Team**

Bob Canon (lay) Ian Alexander reported the results of an email ballot in which CoGS voted for two members to serve on the Planning and

Agenda Team. Kim Chadsey and Sarah Lehman were elected as the two CoGS representatives.

## **Primate's Welcome**

Archbishop Nicholls welcomed members of the new CoGS for the 2023-2025 biennium. The primate outlined their duties and responsibilities as council members and the relationship of CoGS to the broader Anglican Church of Canada.

## **Relationship Building**

Members took part in a team-building exercise, in which table groups came up with humorous captions for photos from the Assembly in Calgary.

## **Formation of Nominating Committee and Nominating Report**

Deputy Prolocutor Tanya Phibbs presented the nominating report, which included a list of nominees for various positions on CoGS for the 2023-2025 biennium. Phibbs thanked all those who offered to let their names stand for various committees.

The following individuals were elected by acclamation to their respective positions:

- Officers of General Synod: Victor-David Mbuyi-Bipungu (Clergy – Canada), Rosie Jane Tailfeathers (Laity – Rupert's Land)
- Resolutions Committee: Susan Bell, Victor-David Mbuyi Bipungu, Dorothy Patterson
- Nominating Committee: Helen Kennedy (Rupert's Land), Dorothy Patterson

(Ontario), Andrew Stephens-Rennie (B.C. and Yukon). Election to be held for member from ecclesiastical province of Canada.

- Expenditures Committee: David Lehmann, Ruth Travers
- Handbook Concerns Committee: Bradley Smith
- Anglican Award of Merit Committee: David Lehmann (B.C. and Yukon), Ruth-Anne Marley (Rupert's Land), Dorothy Patterson (Ontario), Victor-David Mbuyi-Bipungu (Canada), Bradley Smith (Anglican Military Ordinariate)
- CoGS Representative—General Synod Planning Committee: Kim Chadsey
- CoGS Representative—Ministry Investment Fund: Charlotte Hardy
- CoGS Partner to The Episcopal Church's Executive Council: Murray Still

Nominees for the member of the Nominating Committee representing the ecclesiastical province of Canada included Edith Marshall and Victor-David Mbuyi Bipungu.

Elections also remained to be held for the CoGS partner to the Evangelical Church in Canada's National Church Council. Nominees were Walter Kagura, Helen Kennedy, David Lehmann, Edith Marshall and Dorothy Patterson.

Phibbs said nominations were still needed for the CoGS representative to the Canadian Church Historical Society.

### **Group Photo**

CoGS returned to the main chapel for a group photograph.

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

### **Bible Study**

Table groups read and discussed Revelation

22:1-5, which describes an angel showing John the river of life: "On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

### **Rooted in the Word, Flourishing in the Spirit**

The primate introduced the theme for the 2023-2025 binennium: "Rooted in the Word. Flourishing in the Spirit." Noting changes in circumstances from the height of the pandemic, Nicholls said, "What we wanted was a theme that spoke about the church flourishing." She added that the biennial theme built on the theme of General Synod, "Let There Be Greening", which referred to both the greening of the church and of the world, literally and ecologically. The biennial theme, Nicholls said, referred to being rooted in the Word—the words of Scripture and the Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ—and to flourishing in the spirit like the tree of life in Revelation 22, abundant with fruits and leaves for healing.

Council also saw the logo created by Saskia Rowley, General Synod's manager of graphics and print production, to depict the biennial theme.

### **What Have We Brought With Us?**

The primate and the Rev. Carrie Irwin, chaplain to CoGS, invited council members to consider the "roots" of what they brought with them which will inform the work of CoGS, such as events from their own backgrounds, in their dioceses or at General Synod. Members wrote responses on leaves that were placed at the bottom of a large illustration of the tree of life.

Some of the roots members described bringing with them to CoGS included:

- Hope to be Church of God
- Strategic commitments and learning process

- Colonial legacy
- Division and disunity—how do we learn to walk together in unity?
- COVID taught resilience, creativity, and left us anxious, volatile, uncertain
- The hope of reconciliation
- Global relations as Anglican Communion and ecumenical partnerships
- Anglican heritage—scripture, liturgy, canons, hymns, spirituality
- Strong focus on social justice
- The National Native Covenant of 1994, Sacred Circle, Sacred Beginnings, Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, Our Way of Life

*Members took a break from 2:50 p.m. to 3:20 p.m.*

### **Message from 2019-2023 CoGS**

Members reflected upon advice from the 2019-2023 CoGS. The current council highlighted the need to have hard conversations while remembering who they are as God’s people. They spoke about focusing on strategic aspirations and turning them into concrete structural changes. Feedback from their dioceses, members said, should be brought back to subsequent meetings of CoGS and to the Planning and Agenda Team.

The primate recalled the custom of Indigenous Anglicans where anyone can pause discussions that are becoming overly bureaucratic or business-like to call the room into prayer, as a means of recentring everyone. She encouraged CoGS to continue that practice.

### **Group Norms**

Dean Tim Dobbin, co-chair of the Planning and Agenda Team, said CoGS over the years had often come up with a set of norms to guide their work. He invited the new council to generate their own group norms, noting that these were not set in stone and could be

revisited as needed. Table groups discussed two questions, with their responses serving as norms for the current CoGS.

Q1: What group norms have been helpful in past groups you were in?

- Invite and make space for participation from quiet and reluctant voices
- Intentionally see a child of God in each other
- Use the mics
- Listening to understand, not listening to respond
- Only one of us is speaking at a time, no sidebar conversations
- Safe space to say what needs to be said
- Approach differences with curiosity

Q2: Thinking back about a conflict you had experienced, what proved helpful for reconciliation and does that suggest a group norm we might find helpful?

- Be conscious when the group is not ready to move forward with a decision
- Identify clearly everyone’s accusations and recognizing everyone’s emotions
- Do not speak for another person, speak for yourself
- Speak only from your own positionality
- Don’t assume the worst interpretation of a person’s words, assume the best
- Restorative justice, reaching consensus and restoration through the process of hearing all voices
- Clarifying what we mean when there are words that are ambiguous

### **Consensus Decision Making**

The primate explained the methods of consensus decision-making, based on a summary of research she did for a previous CoGS. Past councils had decided to try as much as possible to make decisions on a consensus

model, Nicholls said. Past experience of contentious issues such as same-sex marriage had led to frustrations over the parliamentary system privileging those with procedural skill; with “either-or” decisions leaving “winners” and “losers” and majority decisions carrying by small margins. Many Anglicans, the primate said, sought better ways of reaching decisions that better reflected the nature of the church and the gospel.

Drawing upon experiences of consensus decision-making in the World Council of Churches, the Uniting Church in Australia, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa, and Quaker circles, and pointing to scriptural foundations of the church being the body of Christ, Nicholls laid out common elements of the consensus model. These included deep listening—to each other and to God and the Holy Spirit—information sessions to clarify the issues for everyone, open discussion, and seeking consensus for decisions by exploring differences. The primate also spoke about the need for an effective facilitator who can help guide the discussion and make sure all voices are heard.

*Members broke for hospitality and dinner from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.*

### **Council of the North**

Bishop of Caledonia David Lehmann, chair of the Council of the North, spoke about the church’s work in northern dioceses. He outlined the history of the Council of the North and described the vast distances and low population density in the north. Most of Canada’s population is situated close to the border with the United States and it is these southern dioceses who provide financial assistance to the Council of the North. Even small gifts make a big difference when added up, Lehmann said.

The Council of the North has three committees:

Grants Allocation, Special Funds, and Communications. Its work includes partnerships with the Anglican Foundation of Canada, Huron University College, the College of Emmanuel and St. Chad and the Vancouver School of Theology, including the latter’s Indigenous Studies program.

The primate said funds available to the Council of the North only exist because of apportionments from dioceses. “We know these apportionments are under stress,” Nicholls said. Due to budgetary pressures, many dioceses are not able to provide the apportionments to the General Synod they once did, with some contributing more than others. This affects the General Synod’s capacity to support the Council of the North through grants. “That’s the situation in our church,” the primate said, while stressing that she was not blaming anyone.

### **PWRDF**

Will Postma, executive director of the Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF), gave an update to CoGS on PWRDF’s recent work. Humanitarian work has grown to three-quarters of PWRDF’s overall funding, he said. Most recently PWRDF had raised a significant amount of money for Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza, which is now operating with a “skeletal staff” after being bombed.

PWRDF also began its Indigenous Responsive Programs Grant in the recent period, Postama said. Grants have been offered to Indigenous Birth of Alberta, working closely with the diocese of Edmonton. Kingfisher Lake, the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh and the diocese of Algoma came together to support shipments of food and other items to northern Ontario. The Indigenous Peoples Alliance Manitoba-North received a PWRDF grant for its COVID-19 response, as did 1st Just City in Winnipeg for its Elder in Residence and Harm Reduction

Program.

Postma described the work of PWRDF abroad: partnering with the Anglican diocese of Masasi in Tanzania for a Canadian government-supported water program; providing medical assistance in Ukraine with the help of local partners; and supporting Maison Dorcas in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which provides assistance to women who have suffered from sexual violence. PWRDF has also continued its biweekly "Praying with PWRDF" worship sessions on Zoom, which take place every second Thursday at 1 p.m ET.

Cynthia Haines Turner, PWRDF representative to CoGS, told council about the fund's seven strategic priorities for 2024-2029. During this period, PWRDF plans to:

- Place partners and their priorities at the centre of our work
- Deepen relationships with Indigenous communities in support of Indigenous-led program priorities
- Amplify the voices of young people, affirming their leadership in social justice and the deepening of learning for all
- Nurture and honour a culture of respect, belonging and learning among staff, partners and volunteers
- Support rights-based, sustainable programs and humanitarian assistance
- Inspire generosity through engaging donor stewardship
- Contribute to the vitality of ecumenical groups and other networks

### **Relationship Building**

Council members took part in another team-building exercise, involving a large group version of the game "rock paper scissors".

### **Evening Prayer**

CoGS closed out the day with prayer.

*An evening social took place from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m.*