

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Saturday, November 24, 2018

Council members gathered at 8:45 a.m. at the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga.

Morning Eucharist

The Rev. Canon David Burrows presided at the morning Eucharist, while Ms. Donna Bomberry served as homilist.

Orders of the Day

The Very Rev. Peter Wall, co-chair of the Planning and Agenda Team, read out the Orders of the Day.

Vision Keepers

Members of the Vision Keepers Council, Ms. Judith Moses and Mr. Aaron Sault, presented an update on the work of the council. They discussed the background and mandate of the Vision Keepers—to monitor the Anglican Church of Canada's honouring in word and deed the church's commitment to adopt and comply with the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Meeting in a circle "with fire and gospel at the centre", the Vision Keepers reach findings and recommendations through a consensus mode of decision-making, writing periodic letters updating the Primate, National Indigenous Anglican Bishop, and ACIP chair on their observations and recommendations.

In its presentation to the Council of General Synod (CoGS), Moses and Sault laid out nine findings and recommendations from the work of the Vision Keepers thus far. These included:

1. *Finding:* Implementing UNDRIP is a journey.
Recommendation: That the Vision Keepers Council be established and resourced as a permanent committee of the Anglican Church of Canada.
2. *Finding:* The whole church must be accountable

for progress.

Recommendation: That the Vision Keepers' relationship to the church be arms-length and advisory in nature (similar to the internal auditor) and that it report periodically to ACIP through the National Indigenous Bishop, and to CoGS through the Primate.

3. *Finding:* Information on parish-level reconciliation efforts is too *ad hoc*.
Recommendation: That a national, living reconciliation project inventory be created online to identify local actions so that learning can be shared across the church, overall progress better assessed, and new networks built and sustained; and that dioceses be held accountable for reporting on parish-level projects and initiatives relating to Calls to Action and UNDRIP provisions.
4. *Finding:* Vision Keepers need assessment tools to do the job.
Recommendation: That priority be given to developing missing tools to help Indigenous and non-Indigenous Anglicans to accelerate the pace of progress in reconciliation.
5. *Finding:* Priority must be given to engaging youth in reconciliation.
Recommendation: That stronger emphasis be placed on youth community-level engagement and reconciliation initiatives.
6. *Finding:* Church needs to play a broader advocacy role on key issues.
Recommendation: That the church play a stronger public advocacy role on key issues identified by Indigenous peoples.
7. *Finding:* A common framework and strategy is needed.
Recommendation: That a national change champions group be established to both help build the Indigenous church and to extend the reach of reconciliation at diocesan and community levels across the country.

8. *Finding:* Support is needed for the Indigenous church.

Recommendation: That resources to support the Indigenous ministry be identified on an urgent basis so that essential planning can proceed; that pay equity be implemented; that it be considered whether a new national Anglican, land-based healing centre be established to promote shared healing across the nations; that local Indigenous leadership and decisions affecting Indigenous communities be implemented, including those related to clergy appointments and physical infrastructure.

The Rt. Rev. Sidney Black, a fellow member of the Vision Keepers Council, followed with some positive comments on the council members and their group dynamics in working together. Moses noted that the council still does not have a voice representing Inuit or isolated communities, and that members putting forward such perspectives would help enhance their work.

Following their latest report to CoGS, the next step for the Vision Keepers will be presenting a progress report to the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP) as well as a draft motion for making the Vision Keepers a permanent forum within the church.

Members broke for coffee from 10:15 a.m. to 10:45 a.m.

Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples

Members of ACIP resumed the session by leading CoGS members in singing *Satisfied with Jesus*, which Indigenous Ministries Coordinator Ginny Doctor pointed out marked the inaugural use of her new drum.

In her presentation, the Rev. Canon Doctor gave CoGS members a glimpse of the Ninth Indigenous Anglican Sacred Circle with a slide show displaying photographs from the event, which took place from Aug. 6-11 in Prince George, B.C.

Fellow ACIP member Aaron Sault also displayed slides from the youth presentation at Sacred Circle, in which young Indigenous Anglicans shared issues important to them that they hoped Sacred

Circle and the Anglican Church of Canada would take up as priorities. These goals included more teaching from and meeting with elders; interactive workshops and events; open door policies to encourage community engagement and make youth feel welcome; creating safe spaces for LGBTQ2S+ people; increased ministry to those incarcerated in prisons, where Indigenous people are disproportionately represented; and youth gatherings to tackle issues such as abuse, poverty, and healing.

During a recent drive, Doctor said, she had had an epiphany of sorts: “self-determination is freedom.” Doctor viewed Sacred Circle as a place where those in attendance are “free to be who we are as Indigenous people within the Anglican Church of Canada ... something we want to see across Canada come to life ... so we show our people that we are good and we were put here by our Creator to do good things.”

The Rev. Canon Norm Wesley spoke of plans by ACIP for “rebuilding our church, rebuilding our people”, and in doing so, “challenging Anglicans to build our church into something its’ never been before.” He challenged CoGS to consider how the Church participated in the demonization of traditional Indigenous spiritualities and how we will address that injustice as a body.

Recalling the words of the 1994 covenant to journey together and be champions of change, he asked CoGS members to discuss how they had journeyed together with Indigenous Anglicans over the last three years, whether there had been any change in how they thought, and how the church could strengthen its walk together in years to come.

The general consensus that emerged from the discussion was that members felt their understanding of issues faced by Indigenous peoples had grown by leaps and bounds, and that the church had taken major steps forward. Archbishop and Primate Fred Hiltz spoke of the substantial conversation that the church had had around this topic at the Road to Warm Springs gathering in Pinawa, Manitoba.

The Primate also signalled the ongoing need to consider the Church's role in the demonization of Indigenous spiritualities. Archbishop Hiltz acknowledged the need to thank the Elders for safeguarding their spiritualities in the face of the destructive colonization and persecution in which our Church participated and encouraged. He also acknowledged the need to apologize and seek forgiveness for this injustice and its ongoing impact on Indigenous communities. He described this as an ongoing conversation within the church and expressed his commitment to continue the conversation to affect change.

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

Bible Study

The afternoon Bible study consisted of reading and reflection on Revelation 1:4b-8.

Election

The Rev. Clara Plamondon announced that a second nomination had been received for election of a new lay member to replace Grace Delaney as an officer of the General Synod. The final two nominees were Ms. Susan Little and Ms. Siobhan Bennett.

Interfaith Relationships

The Rt. Rev. Bruce Myers shared work that he had conducted following the failure of a motion to pass at General Synod 2016, which would have removed the Prayer for the Conversion of the Jews from the *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP). At its November 2017 meeting, CoGS had assigned Bishop Myers to look into the matter with an eye towards having a new draft motion ready for the council's June 2018 meeting.

Instead, after engaging in consultation about why the motion had been defeated in 2016, Myers had had a change of heart. The original draft motion he had prepared would have proposed the same action as the 2016 resolution—to expunge the prayer from the BCP entirely. But after representatives of the Prayer Book Society of Canada reached out to him, Myers had engaged in discussion about replacing the old prayer with a new one, which would honour the tradition and style of the prayer book while also reflecting the

church's current interactions with the Jewish community.

Myers displayed the proposed replacement text to CoGS, re-named "Prayer for Reconciliation with the Jews". The new text had been based partly on feedback received from the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus among others, which Myers said reflected the invitation of the Primate to take seriously the church's obligation to engage in dialogue with other faiths. As recently as the 2013 Joint Assembly, the Anglican Church of Canada had recommitted itself to resolutely oppose anti-Semitism. Myers believed that the new prayer would mark a further step towards that goal.

A discussion on the new prayer text followed. One council member expressed satisfaction with the revised prayer, noting that many had left the last General Synod disheartened at the failure of the original motion to pass, and that the altered text put the church in a position that felt more appropriate. Other members asked questions about the rationale behind specific lines. The Primate thanked Bishop Myers for his work.

Election Result

Speaking on behalf of the Nominations Committee, Plamondon announced that Susan Little had been elected as the new lay Officer of the General Synod to replace the Rev. Grace Delaney.

Budget Resolutions

Two motions on the budget and finances were put before the council. Each was adopted by consensus.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod approves the 2019 Budget with a surplus of \$2,805.

Resolution

That the Council of General Synod approves three Ministry Investment Fund grants for a total of \$105,000.

- Global Relations—\$15,350 for Video

Testimony of Bishops in Dialogue to Lambeth 2020.

- Faith, Worship, and Ministry—\$30,000 for a National Gathering of Health Care Chaplains and Spiritual Care Providers
- Communications—\$59,650 Anglican Video Digitization Project Part III

A Common Word

The Rev. Dr. Scott Sharman, animator for ecumenical and interfaith relations, delivered a presentation on *A Common Word*, a global initiative calling for Christian-Muslim dialogue. He began by asking table groups to think of the first word that comes to mind for people when they use the word “Muslim”, and then asked members to describe to their tablemates Muslim neighbours, coworkers, friends, family members, etc. known to them personally.

Sharman surmised that the descriptions council members offered of Muslims they knew personally was very far from common stereotypes of Muslims. He referred to Luke 10:25-37 and the question “Who is my neighbour?” that gave rise to the story of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus challenges our assumptions about who our neighbours are. Sharman recalled his own experiences with neighbours down the hall while he was studying in seminary, which included a Sunni Muslim from Saudi Arabia and a Shia Muslim from Iran, who had come to study at a Christian theological college because the Qur’an had taught them that Christians would welcome them.

Together, Christians and Muslims account for 50-55 per cent of the global population. In Canada, Muslims currently make up 4-5 per cent of the population, with 60 per cent of the country’s Muslim population residing in Ontario.

A Common Word began with a letter, signed in 2007-8 by 138 prominent Muslims from around the world. That number has since expanded to more than 400, and the letter has received 200 endorsements from Christians that include the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. The letter is an extended invitation to major Christian leaders around the world espousing two

key principles:

1. A call to love God above all things; and
2. To live out that love by loving our neighbours.

The title of the letter comes from a line in the Qur’an: “O People of the Book! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner upon Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God.” An invitation to Christians and Muslims to come together for open and sincere dialogue, *A Common Word* is not looking for agreement, but rather seeking common ground to look for peace.

Within Canada, *A Common Word* Alberta was formed in 2012. It has since been embraced across the province by denominations that include Anglicans, Lutherans, Mennonites, Roman Catholics, etc. on the Christian side, and Sunnis, Shia, and Ismaili on the Muslim side. Interactions have revolved around scripture study, theological dialogue, shared meals, parish visits, and community service.

Describing *A Common Word* as the most successful Muslim-Christian interfaith initiative in history, Sharman believed that the program offered an opportunity for the Anglican Church of Canada to take action to advance dialogue, and sought the direction of CoGS to move forward. A motion affirming the church’s continued participation was carried by consensus.

Resolution

That this Council of General Synod:

- a) Affirm the efforts of Faith, Worship, and Ministry to continue the necessary research and consultation related to pursuing an ACC-ELCIC joint initiative in resourcing local Christian-Muslim dialogue according to the *A Common Word* model.
- b) Direct Faith, Worship, and Ministry to develop a draft resolution calling for an official ACC endorsement of the A

Common Word statement to be considered at General Synod 2019.

Market Place #1

The first of two market place sessions allowed council members to attend discussions on the topic of their choice. Topics included:

- *Encouraging Giving, Generosity and Gratitude*
- *Engage Freedom!—Next Steps in Combatting Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery*
- *Medical Assistance in Dying*

Members broke for coffee from 3:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Market Place #2

In the second market place session, members discussed another one of the aforementioned group topics.

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

Marriage Canon: FPIC

General Secretary Michael Thompson introduced remarks by Rt. Rev. Mark MacDonald, National Indigenous Anglican Bishop, regarding Indigenous views of proposed changes to the marriage canon.

Recalling the discussion on the marriage canon at General Synod 2016, Thompson said there had been missteps in how the discussion was handled—particularly regarding the relationship between consideration of the marriage canon, the emerging self-determining Indigenous church within the Anglican Church of Canada, and how those would interact in ways that needed to be taken into account. The church's failure to do so at the last General Synod had resulted in misunderstanding and hurt. As a result, the National Indigenous Bishop was asked to engage the council in considering the relationship of engaging with the marriage canon and needs of Indigenous people across the church.

Discussing such a complex and delicate topic as Indigenous perspectives on same-sex marriage,

Bishop MacDonald said, was a difficult, and at some level, a fearful position to be put in. Indigenous people in general are often afraid of not being understood. "Part of the problem is that the Indigenous understanding of what marriage is is quite complicated and sophisticated relative to the understanding that is in the general public."

The one thing all council members could agree on, he started, was that it is critically important to accept and honour and celebrate the full humanity of all the members of our church, and especially those who are LGBTQ2S+, i.e. those who are in a minority position relative to the heterosexual norms of society. CoGS needed to understand that for Indigenous leaders, not only the recognition of people in their communities who are gay or who have expressed their sexuality in other ways, but protecting them and looking after their well-being was vitally important. That may come as a surprise to those who understand many Indigenous people as having a conservative point of view. LGBTQ2S+ people are, by and large, an accepted part of life in Indigenous communities.

He described a common nature of controversial discussions, akin to debates over abortion or guns in the United States, where you might have five per cent of people strongly for one position and five per cent for the opposite position. The vehemence of those 10 per cent can eclipse the remaining 90 per cent of people in terms of how the media reports on the debate. Such a perspective can make it difficult to understand how in debates such as the proposed changes to the Church's Canon on Marriage, people with a more conservative point of view can be found within that 90 per cent.

Bishop MacDonald said that Indigenous people in general are in the midst of a conversation about same-sex marriage, and want to move forward in a way that respects traditional decision-making. But the larger context of how such discussions are framed means they are essentially held captive to extremes. No matter what he said that night, the bishop said, some people would hear a view that they believe does not help their position, and would characterize him as "either a homophobe or a liberal".

The other major point of agreement among CoGS members is using the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a framework for discussions on reconciliation and Indigenous self-determination. Even so, there is a wide range of opinion among Indigenous people about such matters, the bishop said. “Our culture is changing ... young people are more assimilated” into the wider non-Indigenous culture. While the population tends to look at residential school survivors as assimilated, “smartphones and TV have had a bigger impact. These along with our economic system have shaped how our young people think.” While youth outwardly embrace signs of Indigenous life and culture, they often have as much difficulty accessing traditional cosmology and worldviews as non-Indigenous people, leading to some degree of estrangement from elders.

Another important aspect to consider is that these developments are taking place in communities that are under extreme life-threatening stress, and which cannot face more division on top of the other divisions that have been introduced through churches and government. Bishop MacDonald highlighted that these conditions are seen, particularly by the dominant culture, through the lens of systemic racism.

He carefully explained that systemic racism is not about outward, impolite expressions of hatred by individuals towards Indigenous people, but rather about the deeply embedded and unexamined ideas that still affect the way Indigenous people are perceived, by others and by themselves. “We have been trained,” he said, “to look at Indigenous people as a primitive expression of the larger culture.” On one hand, some may view Indigenous people as being more primitive culturally, either in spite of or because of the effects of colonization, thereby holding views on marriage that the larger culture used to have. Such a perspective may be seen in negative terms. But it may also be romanticized in positive terms as representing a simpler, more faithful time. In either case, the idea that Indigenous people are a primitive expression of the dominant, non-Indigenous culture is a very damaging one.

In many cases, a perception exists of Indigenous people as “the weak-willed victims of the missionaries.” Such a perspective is also incorrect, Bishop MacDonald said. Yes, there were many ways that “the missionaries got to them”, but there were also many ways in which “they didn’t get to them ... a lot of ways people resisted in whatever ways they could,” even though a priest could call in the RCMP. Significantly, “one of the ways they resisted is that most of our communities refused to prosecute gay people, even though clergy demanded it. Our people negotiated, especially our elders—who are now so conservative—negotiated these problems and difficulties.”

“You might look at them as people who were besieged and victims,” Bishop MacDonald added. “I look at them as heroes, because they held on to our cosmology and worldview even though it was being persecuted in unprecedented way.”

Another aspect of systemic racism, the bishop said, was that people in society at large tend to look at Indigenous people and their opinions from the relative safety, security, and privilege of Canadian suburban life. It can be hard to imagine the grip of poverty on Indigenous people. Recent surveys suggest that the unemployment rate in urban Toronto for Indigenous people is 60 per cent. Even if that is a slight overestimate, Bishop MacDonald said, compare that figure to the way that unemployment rates of 20 per cent during the Great Depression are talked about in such a horrified manner. Such poverty plays a significant role in high suicide rates among Indigenous people.

In such a desperate socioeconomic context, he said, “when you introduce a difficult, contentious subject, it is painful, and means that some people may die, because you can’t afford to have disagreements. So we treat these things very gingerly and carefully.”

The bishop believed that the topic of same-sex marriage is an urgent one and clarified that he was not trying to diminish its importance. “What we don’t understand is the need and rush to impose this upon our communities in this way.”

Indigenous people were not asking for a veto, but for their experience to be bracketed. He stressed that a variety of opinion exists on the subject among Indigenous people, who highly value individuality. Indigenous people, by and large, are saying: “We’re still working on this, but it is something we have to work out in our own communities, in our own time, with our own approach.”

“By and large”—Bishop MacDonald was careful to use this qualifying phrase—Indigenous people see marriage as a spiritual union enacted between male and female. This is the most prevalent point of view, though not the only one, and its emphasis is primarily on the ceremony rather than the couple. The larger non-Indigenous society has shifted in recent decades to look upon marriage as primarily a rite between two people. From this non-Indigenous perspective, who has the right to say who can and cannot be married, which seems to be a fundamental human right? But from a common Indigenous perspective, the question is: Who is a part of this ceremony? Such a subtle difference can be almost impossible to grasp. But for Indigenous elders, the ceremony, its integrity, and what it displays and portrays is most significant.

Marriage in this sense is seen not a pastoral expression towards two people, but rather a ceremony in which some of the most important cultural ideas about the universe are portrayed. Male and female are seen to represent certain principles, and for this reason the difference between the two is seen as essential. Though even in the time before colonization there was a place in Indigenous society for gay people, who were often revered, there was no parallel ceremony for marriage. “That does not mean, in any way, shape or form, that Indigenous people feel that it’s not right for gay people to have the right for marriage in their own way, in their own communities,” Bishop MacDonald said. He had personally never heard an Indigenous person express disapproval that Canada has gone in that direction. Again, the issue in Indigenous communities is what this means spiritually and culturally.

A further important point to consider is that

because of the shape of colonialism, the Anglican Church often plays a critical role in remote reserves, to the point where even Pentecostals get both “married and buried” in the Anglican Church. “What we decide about marriage is a critical question for communities.”

All of these issues provide the context for UNDRIP, which describes the right that Indigenous people have to decide and shape their own culture and ceremonies based on their own history, culture, and ideas. “We’re not asking to be given the right to say what you do, or for the right to be mean to people,” the bishop said. “What we’re asking for is the right to have this discussion decided on our own, on our own principles.” He apologized that Indigenous communities had not been able to do this on the same timeline as others, but they had been confronting many other pressing challenges in their communities.

Bishop MacDonald recounted the visit of Maori Anglicans to North America in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Indigenous people were astonished and inspired at the way in which they had been able to assert their cultural identity in an Anglican way. The Maori credited the Treaty of Waitangi for giving them this power. The church had been a co-signatory to the treaty, which gave Indigenous people the right to be who they were. What Indigenous people saw in such a treaty then, they now see in UNDRIP. “What we are claiming is the right to decide in an Indigenous way and to work these things through on our own, and ... to be bracketed in this discussion,” Bishop MacDonald concluded.

A plenary discussion and question and answer period followed. CoGS members expressed deep appreciation to the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop for clarifying Indigenous perspectives on same-sex marriage and the proposed changes to the marriage canon. The Primate expressed his own appreciation, while pointing out that LGBTQ2S+ people within the church must also be listened to. He hoped that the evening session would give council members food for thought in the next day’s discussion on how to move forward with regard to the marriage canon.

Jubilee Commission

Council members received a memorandum proposing a list of six people that Archbishop Hiltz had named to the Jubilee Commission, each serving a three-year term with potential for renewal and reporting to CoGS. These names included:

- The Rt. Rev. Riscylla Shaw
- Ms. Judith Moses
- The Rev. Canon Laverne Jacobs
- The Rev. Pamela Rayment
- The Rt. Rev. Larry Beardy
- The Ven. Jim Boyles

The Primate sought ratification of the names proposed for the Jubilee Commission and the prayers of CoGS as they embarked on the work assigned to them. The motion was carried.

Evening Prayer

Holden evening prayer took place in the chapel.

Members gathered for an evening social from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m.