

# COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Friday, November 24, 2023

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

## **Morning Prayer**

The Rev. Canon Carrie Irwin led CoGS in morning prayer.

## **Elections**

Deputy Prolocutor Tanya Phibbs presented the results of elections for CoGS positions in the 2023-2025 biennium. Dorothy Patterson was elected as the ecclesiastical province of Canada's representative on the Nominating Committee, Chris Wood as a member of the General Synod Planning Committee, Archdeacon Bill Mous as a member of the Handbook Concerns Committee, and Bishop Susan Bell as CoGS representative to the Church Historical Society.

## **Primate's Remarks and Discussion**

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, recounted her activities since the last meeting of CoGS in June. She described attending the 2023 Canadian Lutheran Anglican Youth (CLAY) gathering in Ontario, the first time CLAY has taken place in person since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The theme of the latest CLAY was "Ashes and Embers". Indigenous learning was key to this particular event, Nicholls said, with the Anglican Foundation of Canada sponsoring a group of Indigenous youth to attend. Reconciliation animator Dawn Maracle provided leadership in working with Indigenous participants and setting the tone for Indigenous

learning each day.

September offered the primate a chance to present three of the four recent Anglican Award of Merit winners with their awards: Elizabeth Hutchinson in Arundel, Que.; Donna Bomberry in Beamsville, Ont.; and George Cadman in Vancouver, B.C. The Anglican Award of Merit is the church's highest honour to lay members and is awarded in the recipient's home parish. The fourth recipient, Dion Lewis, will have his award presented in February.

Bishop Sam Rose of the diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador recently invited the primate to join him on a trip to Labrador and to Rigolet, Nfld., the latter being the southernmost Inuit community in Canada. During this trip Nicholls attended the diocese's strategic planning meeting in Goose Bay, with commitments firmly rooted in the strategic plans of the wider Anglican Church of Canada. Nicholls described energy and excitement among the clergy and lay leaders who attended the meeting.

In October the primate attended the House of Bishops, which meets twice a year at the Mount Carmel Spiritual Retreat Centre in Niagara Falls. The meeting included a full day of Anglican metropolitans meeting with bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), since the jurisdictions of metropolitans and ELCIC bishops overlap closely. There the two groups of clergy shared experiences of the challenges of ministry.

In early November, the primate travelled with Bishop of Huron Todd Townshend and Global Relations director Andrea Mann to Brazil. The Anglican Church of Canada has had a growing relationship with the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil in recent years, Nicholls said, with the two sharing concerns over issues around human sexuality, climate change and Indigenous rights. The Canadian church has offered modest financial support to ensure Archbishop Marinez Rosa dos Santos Bassotto, primate of the Brazilian church, has the staff needed for her ministry.

During their visit to Brazil, Nicholls, Townshend and Mann visited parish projects focused on community needs, such as youth programs. They visited the Amazon River, which has dropped 40 metres since June—part of which is due to normal summertime patterns, Nicholls said, but which may be exacerbated due to forest fires in land where clearcutting is taking place. The three Canadian Anglicans also witnessed ecumenical relationships of the Brazilian church, visiting with the Roman Catholic bishop in Manaus.

Turning to the subject of Israel-Palestine, the primate noted that Richard Sewell, dean of St. George's College in Jerusalem, had spoken to the House of Bishops on Oct. 23. Nicholls and ELCIC National Bishop Susan Johnson had themselves visited the Holy Land last December. Nicholls said it was her understanding that there were no hospitals currently open in Gaza. She pushed back against criticism she had heard that the Anglican Church of Canada has not been sufficiently opposed to the acts of Hamas, with the primate condemning the attack by Hamas on Oct. 7 as "unacceptable".

Nicholls also said the Anglican Church of Canada continues to advocate with the Canadian government for a "voice consistent with its own policies." Last week, Nicholls and

Johnson wrote an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau expressing "shame and deep disappointment" at Canada voting against United Nations General Assembly resolutions consistent with its own stated policies. These included two resolutions supporting Palestine refugees and one condemning Israeli settlements, which Canada was one of the only countries to vote against. A resolution reaffirming the rights of Palestinian refugees to their property and asking the UN to protect Arab assets and property rights in Israel, for example, passed 156-6 with Canada one of the six dissenting states. "We await a stronger response from the Canadian government," Nicholls said.

"The Christian community in the Holy Land has always stood against violence by any perpetrators and sought peaceful resolutions to the tensions before Oct. 7," the primate said. Christians had faced increasing persecution before Oct. 6 and now faced even more, she added, but the Christian community was committed to remaining in the Holy Land, "standing for peace and reconciliation as called for by Christ." The week before CoGS, leaders of Churches Beyond Borders—the four-way full communion partnership that includes the Anglican Church of Canada, ELCIC, The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—held a Zoom meeting to discuss the situation in Israel-Palestine and will be issuing pastoral letters soon calling on churches to pray each day of Advent.

"This conflict is a complex combination of history and politics without easy resolution," Nicholls said. "This war will not resolve it. There will be no winners." She recommended the book *The Wall Between: What Jews and Palestinians Don't Want to Know About Each Other* by Raja Khouri and Jeffrey Wilkinson, which the primate said had helped her to understand the depth to which each side in the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict is embedded in their identities. Nicholls encouraged CoGS to pray for peace wherever war and conflict continues, referring specifically to Ukraine and the Democratic Republic of Congo in addition to the Holy Land. "To some prayer seems like a useless activity, as if we are blowing in the wind," the primate said. "For us it is the ultimate sign of faith and hope that God is in the midst of human suffering and there is a way through."

On a personal note, Nicholls said she is discerning the date of her retirement, after General Synod voted not to extend her term. The primate said she will retire before Oct. 1, 2024. When she discerns the date, she will write to the senior metropolitan, currently Archbishop Anne Germond, who along with the prolocutor and deputy prolocutor will see which metropolitan is prepared to serve as acting primate until General Synod 2025.

### **Financial Statements and 2024 Budget**

Treasurer and CFO Amal Attia presented General Synod's consolidated financial statements for the nine months ending Sept. 30, 2023 and its budget for 2024. Total revenue to September 2023 was \$6,820,449 compared to a budget of \$7,424,613, resulting in a deficit of \$604,164. The largest stream of revenue to General Synod, proportional gifts from dioceses, was \$4,846,911 versus a budget of \$5,571,639, or \$724,728 lower than what had been budgeted for. Attia said this drop in proportional gifts did not come as a surprise, given financial instability and uncertainty since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Total expenses were \$8,165,707 for this period against planned expenses of \$8,596,231, meaning expenses were \$430,523 lower than planned. Investment income was \$306,445 against a plan of \$291,564 due to market value gains and net capital gains, which Attia said are hard to predict.

Attia presented the proposed 2024 budget, which was "almost a break-even budget" in the words of the budget report. This balanced budget was possible due to a \$295,740 transfer of internally designated net assets used to offset program expenses, a \$110,000 reverse in annual depreciation and market recovery for the Consolidated Trust Fund investment. A motion to approve the proposed 2024 budget carried.

### **Resolution**

That the Council of General Synod approve the proposed budget for 2024.

### **Pension Committee**

Bob Pensions director Rekha Menon and pension committee member Bob Boeckner presented the report of the pension committee, which was mainly a general overview of church pensions and benefits. Boeckner explained the different types of pension plans in Canada—defined benefit plans, target benefit plans, defined contribution plans—and types of benefit plans. He outlined the governance structure for the General Synod Pension Plan, the duties of the board of trustees and the role of the Pension Office Corporation.

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

### **Gospel-Based Discipleship**

Table groups read and reflected upon Luke 19:45-48 for gospel-based discipleship. The passage details Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple in Jerusalem.

### **Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples**

Rosie Jane Tailfeathers and the Rev. Canon Murray Still, co-chairs of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP), presented their report to CoGS. Still spoke about the Covenant and Our Way of Life—founding documents for

Sacred Circle, the self-determining Indigenous church. Both were ratified at the 2023 gathering of Sacred Circle. He mentioned the appointment of Chris Harper as the new national Indigenous Anglican archbishop following a long interview process.

Still also detailed the first-ever Sacred Beginnings gathering of Indigenous youth and young adults that took place from May 1 to 8 in Beausejour, Man., which had provided lessons on how to host similar gatherings across the country. Many participants came from communities that face problems with drugs, gangs and suicide, Still said. He described the goal for Sacred Beginnings to serve as a kind of Sacred Circle for young adults, with its own youth council, to promote healing.

Tailfeathers reported more details on the latest Sacred Circle, which took place from May 28 to June 2 in Ramara, Ont., electing a new ACIP and ratifying the Covenant and Our Way of Life. The new ACIP will assist in the ongoing work of the Jubilee Commission, which has a mandate to seek ways to fund Sacred Circle. Tailfeathers said ACIP will also continue work with various committees of the national church, such as the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF); to support suicide prevention and to seek funding for the program "From Trauma to New Life", which partners with community organizations to offer trauma response training for Indigenous communities in northern Manitoba.

National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper described his work since taking on the position and stepping down as bishop of Saskatoon. He thanked General Synod staff for their patience and said the experience had represented a steep learning curve. Harper and Donna Bomberry, former Indigenous Ministries coordinator, are currently handling all Indigenous Ministries work at the General

Synod level. Hiring the necessary staff is therefore one of their main priorities.

In recent months, Harper attended an interfaith dinner in the diocese of Saskatchewan and served as a keynote speaker. He attended meetings of the House of Bishops and Indigenous House of Bishops, the Sacred Beginnings gathering in Manitoba and a consecration ceremony at the College of Emmanuel and St. Chad. Harper had attended Sacred Circle, which had included his installation as national Indigenous archbishop, and participated in a Canadian Council of Churches ecumenical dialogue on Indigenous spirituality. He attended a gathering on Parliament Hill in Ottawa with the primate for a commemoration site to missing and murdered Indigenous women. He attended General Synod 2023 in Calgary, as well as a United Church of Canada Indigenous spiritual conference.

Harper also attended CLAY 2023 along with the delegation of Indigenous youth. He had been asked to do smudging ceremonies for various funerals, including that of former primate Michael Peers, for which he was greatly honoured. Harper participated in a march at Brady Road landfill in Winnipeg, joining calls for a search to recover the bodies of murdered Indigenous women. He also participated in meetings of the Anglican Indigenous Network and in the first meeting of the Anglican Indigenous Leadership Initiative, which is dedicated to building up the next generation of Indigenous leadership.

The latter meetings took place in New Zealand where hosts performed haka, ceremonial Maori dances. Council members watched a video of one of the haka. Harper compared the haka to the Indigenous practice of holding an eagle feather to talk. There was a time when such practices were forbidden by colonial authorities, he noted. "We're at a crossroads now, a time of

change,” Harper said. In a recent interview with Newfoundland television, Harper said youth want authenticity and that the church must be authentic in what it says and what it proclaims, which is part of the reason he had started his truth-telling and reconciliation tour through Canada, such as his trip to Newfoundland and Labrador. Harper said he was blessed to serve many people in his new ministry. The new CoGS will play an important role in the Anglican Church of Canada, he said. The national Indigenous archbishop invited CoGS to walk alongside Sacred Beginnings, Sacred Circle and ACIP as they offer the Covenant, Our Way of Life and a “new way of doing things.”

The primate said after ACIP’s presentation there was much excitement about what was happening in the church, about walking together and learning. She noted that reconciliation animator Dawn Maracle had been working with the United Church of Canada on a resource for reconciliation, and looked forward to making that available so parishes could be directly engaged in this work.

*Members took a break from 3 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.*

### **2023-2025 CoGS Deliverables**

General Secretary Alan Perry laid out to CoGS the tasks that General Synod had instructed it to deliver for the next General Synod in 2025, based on resolutions passed in Calgary. These included:

- Resolution A101—Commission a document on the history, structure and governance of the Anglican Church of Canada.
- Resolution A102—Strategic Planning Working Group. Establish an implementation group for the new strategic plan.
- Resolution A120—Full Communion with the Moravians. What are the

implications for CoGS as we begin to live into this new relationship?

- Resolution A129—National coordinating committee for unity and mission with United Church of Canada. Work with the United Church to establish this group.
- Resolution A200—National Advisory Council on Dismantling Racism. Establish council in collaboration with ACIP.
- Resolution A201—Dismantling Racism. This is the work of Faith, Worship and Ministry and the National Advisory Council for Dismantling Racism.
- Resolution A202—Responding to Call to Action No. 59 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which calls on “church parties to the Settlement Agreement to develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church’s role in colonization, the history and legacy of residential schools, and why apologies to former residential school students, their families, and communities were necessary.”
- Resolution A203—Net-zero: travel and carbon offsets. This resolution requires the church to “seek to reduce the carbon impact of travel for meetings of General Synod, the Council of General Synod and its committees, when possible, by offering online or hybrid options and choosing lower-carbon travel as a witness to the rest of the church, and to report on these efforts regularly and to General Synod 2025.” It also mandates these bodies to “purchase carbon offsets for such travel as is deemed still to be necessary, using offset initiatives of Indigenous communities where possible.”
- Resolution A204—Climate Emergency. “Encourage Anglican parishes in Canada to work on reducing greenhouse gas

emissions to help Canada reach a science-based target to keep global temperature increases at or below 1.5 degrees Celsius”; “request the Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice coordinating committee to report progress back to Council of General Synod annually and to General Synod 2025.”

- Resolution A205—Bottled water. “Direct Council of General Synod, its councils and committees to immediately eliminate bottled water use for all meetings, except in locations where safe drinking water is unavailable.”
- Resolution C008—Proportionality of representation among bishops. “Request the House of Bishops engage in a discussion regarding the principle of proportionality of membership, as reflected in the constitution of General Synod for the membership in the Orders of Laity and Clergy, and to recommend a method for applying this principle to the Order of Bishops for consideration by the Governance Working Group and the Council of General Synod, in advance of the next meeting of General Synod.”
- Resolution C009—Consensus decision making. “Determine what would be necessary to implement a consensus model of decision making for future meetings of the General Synod ... and report to the next meeting of the General Synod.”

Table groups divided up the resolutions among themselves and spent 20 minutes in discussion about what would be needed to advance work on each of these resolutions. Reporting back to plenary, table representatives made a range of suggestions including the formation of task forces, working groups, and working with ministries of General Synod to find individuals who might join these groups. In some cases

they sought clarification about the deliverables requested by General Synod. Council members set tentative dates for when working groups might be formed and report back to CoGS on their progress.

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

### **Ministries of General Synod**

CoGS split into groups who rotated between four sessions in which they received reports on different ministries of General Synod: the Office of the General Secretary, Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice, Resources for Mission and Global Relations.

### **Evening Prayer**

The day ended with council joining in evening prayer.

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