

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Sunday, November 26, 2023

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

Flourishing in the Spirit

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, invited CoGS to continue their exercise adding to the "tree of life" art illustrating the theme of the 2023-2025 biennium, "Rooted in the Word, Flourishing in the Spirit". Council members reflected upon what they felt had begun to flourish through the current meeting and what they hoped the flourishing might look like as they head into the end of the biennium—writing their responses on paper "leaves" that were affixed to the tree.

Examples of flourishing that members identified included:

- A sense of community
- True leadership and accountability
- Accomplishments that will stand for something
- Recognition of the need for structural change through the Primate's Commission
- Hope: Address the power dynamic of the geography of the room
- Active engagement of all CoGS members in the work of General Synod
- Hope: That we get more skilled at a listening/deciding process
- Emerging: More inclusive. Building bridges. More Indigenous people than ever
- Flourishing of tangible initiatives

- through the strategic commitments
- Extend the mission and the outpouring of faith into the wider world
 - An enthusiasm for the future of church
 - Putting all the resolutions into practice
 - Fellowship; encouraged by walking together
 - Positive change for positive Christian witness
 - Relationship building, expanding resources, working together
 - Signs of "healing of the nations" through work of CoGS (a reference to Revelation 22:1-5, which inspired the biennial theme)
 - Emerging focus on discipleship in collaboration with dioceses

Members took a break from 9:50 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Eucharist

CoGS held a closing Eucharist in the main chapel. National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper provided the homily.

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

Partner Reflections (Part 2)

The Rev. Chris Bishopp, representative to CoGS from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, spoke in his partner reflection about the history of Anglicans and Lutherans attending each other's meetings over the last few decades. In his experience on the ELCIC's National Church Council, Bishopp said, Lutherans have been blessed by the presence of

Anglican members, including the “deep and fruitful relationship” between the ELCIC national bishop and primates of the Anglican Church of Canada.

The ELCIC has been enriched by the diversity of the Anglican Church of Canada, Bishopp added, noting that he has benefitted from the leadership and presence of Indigenous Anglicans at CoGS. He also highlighted the creation of the Anglican-Moravian-Lutheran governing committee. Many issues Anglicans and Lutherans talk about are similar, such as climate change. Bishopp said the National Church Council is considering how it can better use resources in relation to the environment.

Group Norms (Part 2)

The Ven. Tanya Phibbs presented a summation of group norms, including those CoGS had agreed to in a plenary session Nov. 23 and more than five pages’ worth of suggestions members had emailed. The document included primary meeting norms, norms for shaping meetings, guidelines for speaking and listening, how to navigate disagreements and conflicts; and advice to CoGS members about dealing with the media.

“Conflict’s not a bad thing,” Phibbs said. “It’s how we deal with it than can be sinful.”

General Secretary’s Report

General Secretary Alan Perry presented a brief report, noting that it had been a full meeting for CoGS with much for everyone to learn and absorb, many people to meet and reports to read. He bade members farewell as they prepared to return home.

Taking It Home

Canon (lay) Ian Alexander led an exercise to help CoGS members take home what they had learned during the meeting. He reiterated that the role of CoGS members is to carry out the

work delegated to council by General Synod, make decisions affecting the national church, provide advice to senior leadership, bring the voice of the whole church into the conversation, and raise awareness across the Anglican Church of Canada about what the national church is doing.

Table groups spent several minutes each discussing the questions of what audiences they needed to reach, what messages CoGS needed to deliver to them, and what communications channels would best help those messages reach their intended audiences. Council members said their intended audiences included ecclesiastical provinces, dioceses, congregations, metropolitans, bishops, youth, church institutions, the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, partner churches such as the ELCIC and Moravians, national staff colleagues, international partners on issues of shared concern, coordinating and standing committees, donors, program networks, and people interested in subjects that had been focused on at the meeting.

Among the messages that different members of CoGS sought to convey to the church:

- The church’s financial picture and what it means: there is good work going on, frugally and with concrete impacts
- Impacts of deliverables discussion
- Work plans of staff and coordinating committees
- C resolutions were given thought, consideration and conversation
- Adopted “Journalistic Policies and Practices” document
- Provided feedback on revised sexual misconduct policy, work that is ongoing
- Richness of growing diversity at council that better reflects who we are as the Anglican Church of Canada
- Meeting began with smudging

ceremony, an important part of our time together

- Impressed at how hard Primate Linda Nicholls is working—she never gives up
- How open church structures are to possible changes
- A lot of good ministries happening at national church level, but there is not an abundance of national staff. Shows why donations matter so much, allowing churches to do what we do.
- Important work of Council of the North
- Dynamic atmosphere at CoGS and connection and willingness to work between members
- Connection of parishes to national church
- Importance of how resolutions are written—intelligible, grammatical

Channels members identified to communicate these messages included diocesan newspapers and newsletters, CoGS highlights from General Synod, bishop announcements, parish announcements, church websites, social media, Zoom gatherings, reports at meetings (e.g. parish councils), bulletin board flyers in churches, and word of mouth through personal connections.

Closing Remarks

The primate thanked CoGS for their patience in community building. Future CoGS meetings would be shorter and more intense, she said, as work begins to pile up that will need to be done in less time. "You're going to be facing some hard work ahead."

The next CoGS will take place in late May, which Nicholls said is an unusually long amount of time between meetings. This scheduling resulted from availability of the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre, which must serve as the location in part for budgetary reasons. Due to the lengthy gap between meetings, the

Planning and Agenda has begun talking about the possibility of a CoGS meeting over Zoom in the middle of this period, potentially in March. The primate advised council members to watch their email for further updates.

Nicholls thanked council for the breadth of their engagement at the meeting. "My sense is that everyone has been participating," the primate said, adding that this was good to see and suggested that CoGS members felt comfortable and that council was a safe space to express their views. "You bring unique gifts to the table," she said, echoing a theme from the national Indigenous archbishop's homily. Nicholls said she looked forward to seeing what members shared across the church from their experience at council. She concluded the meeting by leading CoGS in a closing prayer.

Council adjourned at 2:30 p.m.