

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Friday, November 6, 2020

Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered together online at 11 a.m. EST via Zoom conference.

Opening Worship

The Rev. Louise Peters, chaplain to CoGS, led the opening worship service. Bishop Joey Royal provided the homily, in which he contrasted the temporal nature of current events such as elections or pandemics with the eternal nature of God.

Opening Formalities

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, welcomed council members and General Synod staff. She introduced motions to adopt the minutes of the March, June, July and September 2020 CoGS meetings, as well as the agenda for the current meeting. All were carried.

Primate's Remarks

The primate began her remarks by acknowledging the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic. "We had expected this might be over by now," she said of the general mentality at the beginning of the pandemic. "Instead we find ourselves settling into a semi-permanent pattern of living and working." She recalled being struck by creative ways that people had adapted, such as a family near her home celebrating Halloween by going through the woods on a scavenger hunt. "New traditions may have been born in 2020 by necessity, but discovered to be good," the primate said. "Our lives are changing."

The church continues to offer online worship. Increasingly, the primate said, Anglicans recognized that the "either/or" dichotomy of in-person worship vs. online worship would likely not fully return, as the church had discovered new opportunities to connect online locally and globally. The previous night's evening worship service and installation of Alan Perry as the new general secretary, for example, had been watched by people across Canada and in New Zealand, Hawaii and Wales.

The primate reported that Anglican churches had been faithful in following the advice of medical professionals. To date, she was not aware of any COVID-19 outbreak traced to an Anglican gathering. Despite the restrictions of lockdown, she sensed continuing hope and faithfulness. In October, Nicholls had visited Sault Ste. Marie and the former Shingwauk Indian Residential School, now the location of Algoma University. She had also visited the former Church of St. John the Evangelist, now home of the local Métis Cultural Centre, where she heard the Métis story of that area and was encouraged by the deep partnership between the Anglican diocese of Algoma and Indigenous needs and concerns in that area and community.

Amid the ongoing pandemic, the primate said, there remained a concern for mental health as isolation and loneliness weigh heavily on families, grandparents, single people, and anyone for whom connection is essential. She also expressed concern for clergy, many of whom are overwhelmed with weariness and

exhaustion. The national church office was attempting to offer assistance where it could, such as by preparing a service of lessons and carols to make available for parishes.

The House of Bishops had met over Zoom for five days in the fall. Including three bishops elected since September, the house counted 18 bishops elected and consecrated since January 2015. At this meeting it had discussed the work of the Governance Working Group (GWG), the role of the Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination, and ongoing dialogue with the United Church of Canada. Nicholls said the bishops had been “delighted” to welcome the Very Rev. Robert Willis, dean of Canterbury Cathedral, who “reminded us of gifts we have in difficult times. He, like us, had discovered that people around the globe are hungry for prayer.”

Also in the fall, the primate had met with her counterparts from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and the Episcopal Church. The four church leaders committed to deepening learning across borders.

The previous day, Nicholls and primates around the world had met online with Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby. They spent the morning talking about the pandemic and how churches are struggling with COVID-19 and its economic impact. Several provinces shared difficulties with paying clergy stipends, and spoke about retiring clergy who have no pensions or support. Refusal to comply with the directives of governments and health professionals are evident in many parts of the world.

The primates also met with representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO) to hear the latest updates on COVID-19, and their view that a vaccine would likely not be available until April 2021 at the very earliest. They shared what

Nicholls described as the “disturbing” news that strains of COVID-19 had mutated, jumping from humans to animals and back, necessitating the culling of 17 million mink in Denmark. Health professionals are trying to determine how these mutated forms of COVID-19 will respond to vaccines now in development.

The WHO made clear it saw faith communities as critical partners, Nicholls said, and were eager to meet with the primates as representatives of the Anglican Communion. WHO officials asked the primates to be “encouragers of shared values and working partnerships” with the medical community to keep the virus as controlled as possible so as not to overwhelm health-care systems. A communiqué from the primates’ meeting would be released on the coming Monday after CoGS.

Closer to home, Nicholls asked council members to remember the diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, which had been hit by the unexpected death of Bishop Geoffrey Peddle while he was on a short leave. The death of the bishop—who had been intending to retire on Dec. 31—had “shaken the diocese”, Nicholls said. The vote for his successor will take place at the sixth electoral synod for the diocese on Nov. 28. She asked the council to pray for the Peddle family.

The primate concluded by putting forward a motion to appoint a new vice-chancellor. With the retirement of Ann Bourke in that role at the end of August, Nicholls had decided to recommend the appointment of a successor. The primate put forward a motion for the appointment of Canon Clare Burns as vice-chancellor, describing her as “a faithful Anglican with extensive legal experience.” The motion carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of

General Synod, upon recommendation by the Primate, confirm the appointment of Canon Clare Burns as Vice-Chancellor.

A Changing Church

The theme for the 2019-2022 triennium—"A Changing Church, A Searching World, A Faithful God"—formed the basis for the next item on the agenda. Over the next three days of business, the primate said, CoGS would spend some time going over each part of that theme.

Council members split into breakout rooms, each with a facilitator, to discuss and reflect upon the first part of the theme, "A Changing Church."

Council took a break from 12:30 p.m. to 12:45 p.m.

Governance Working Group

Chancellor David Jones on behalf of the GWG recapped earlier presentations from the last few CoGS meetings. He reminded council members that the current phase of group's work was meant to be educative. Following the November meeting, the GWG would gather all the data it has received and produce a report.

The presentation at this meeting dealt with different methods of voting for different issues and different voting thresholds, e.g. whether motions would pass by a simple majority or a two-thirds majority by order. Council members split into breakout groups for facilitated discussion and to provide feedback on the presentation.

Upon reconvening in plenary, they had the opportunity to ask questions to Jones. One member asked about the significance of surveys that council had been asked to fill out on their initial reactions to proposed methods of decision-making for General Synod. "It's not a vote," Jones clarified. "It's an indication." The

GWG would examine such feedback and incorporate the data into its forthcoming report.

The chancellor concluded by putting forward a motion on determining the number of delegates to General Synod 2022, which was carried.

Resolution

That the number of clergy and lay delegates for General Synod 2022 be determined by reference only to the four specified dates (Easter, Pentecost, the 2nd Sunday of September, and Christmas) in 2019.

Council members took a lunch break from 1:30 p.m. to 2:15 p.m.

Coffee Catch-Up

Council briefly socialized over Zoom before resuming the afternoon business.

Strategic Planning Working Group

Canon Ian Alexander, co-chair of the Strategic Planning Working Group (SPWG), and congregational development consultant Janet Marshall provided an update on the strategic planning process. The first phase involved 11 listening groups from across the Anglican Church of Canada sharing and reflecting on the current state of the church. Some of the groups had met again and decided they wished to continue their work.

Through the listening groups, the SPWG had obtained a large measure of feedback. Describing the "bigger picture," Alexander and Marshall said that the COVID-19 pandemic was revealing both the values and the fault lines of the church. Anglicans could not always be sure what was here to stay and what would return to normal afterward, but felt a "permanent seismic shift" that suggested the inevitability and need

for transformative change in every area. For Indigenous communities, the pandemic felt like merely one more crisis in a context of crises. The church is still in a moment of uncertainty, in which it has an opportunity to make things new—an opportunity that could be both frightening and exciting. While Anglicans had adapted quickly and creatively to the changes wrought by the pandemic, there was an increasing sense of fatigue.

The SPWG grouped its feedback into six main areas:

Virtual church: Technology had enabled Anglicans to bridge isolation, realize new opportunities and expand their reach. There was a general sense that the future will be a hybrid of in-person and online worship. However, the pandemic had revealed inequities in technology access.

Identity and purpose: The stories of “who we are and what we’re doing” are changing. The institutional church increasingly seems less important than the community of the church. Connections across multiple cultures, languages and geographies had served as an affirmation of Anglicanism, with a vision and strategy for the national church rooted in its ecclesiology. But Anglicans also expressed concern about what it means to be a church that doesn’t gather, citing the importance of the Eucharist and singing.

New ways of being emerging: The church was undergoing a transformation from “parochial” to “regional” in the wake of the pandemic, and from a traditional church to new missional communities. Many Anglicans believe there will be no snap back to “normal”. There is a growth in online small groups for discipleship, a questioning of clericalism, and a new focus on the basic mission of serving those in need. Buildings are no longer such a priority, and

younger leaders in particular see their future as one of living in continuous change. The development of the self-determining Indigenous church is paralleled by the growth of new relationships—postcolonial, anti-racist and ecumenical.

Leadership and structures: Anglicans find leadership very important, highlighting the role of bishops in setting a positive tone of nonanxiety, connectedness and compassion. Structures and systems that facilitate relationships, that are agile, and that redistribute and share resources are needed at all levels of the church. Hierarchy in the church is being levelled with the aid of the internet, making possible a more dispersed leadership and greater cross-country collegiality. Greater emphasis is being placed on the importance and effectiveness of lay leadership.

Sustainability: Members of the church express a universal concern over finances and are pondering their property needs and the best use of existing properties. Aging congregations have meant a reluctance to gather during the pandemic.

Social justice and advocacy: COVID-19 is exacerbating social distress in homes and communities. Community agencies view the church as a valued partner, able to act quickly and meet people where they are. Among social service groups, there is a hunger for the church to speak out on issues such as an improved social safety net, basic universal income, support for the vulnerable, internet accessibility, and racism. Anglicans highlighted the need to dismantle white privilege in church structures and leadership. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, Indigenous Anglicans are hopeful for the self-determining Indigenous church and there is a broad recognition by others that it must be accomplished.

Alexander put three questions forward to council to discuss in small groups, each based on one of the themes:

1. Does this sound like what you are hearing and experiencing in your context?
2. What would you add to this? What do you question?
3. Where here is important for the national church's work? What is out of scope.

Council split into breakout groups to provide responses and feedback.

Faith, Worship, and Ministry

The Rev. Canon Scott Sharman, animator for ecumenical and interfaith relations, spoke about the growing ecumenical dialogue between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Moravian Church in Canada. The Moravian Church is one of the oldest Protestant denominations in the world, with a history of persecution that has resulted in a strong commitment to ecumenism. There are currently Moravian congregations in 38 countries, including 19 congregations in Canada.

Anglican dialogue with the Moravians is rooted in Commitment 9 of the Waterloo Declaration—"To continue to work for the full visible unity of the whole Church of God"—as well as the Memorandum of Mutual Recognition of Relations of Full Communion at General Synod 2019 between Anglican and Lutheran churches in Canada and the United States. The ELCA has been in full communion with Moravians since 1999, and the Episcopal Church since 2011.

A trilateral Anglican-Lutheran-Moravian task group is set to begin work on building ecumenical dialogue in late 2020/early 2021. Its mandate is to develop a proposal for mutual recognition of relations of full communion for approval by CoGS in spring 2022, and for

potential consideration at the Anglican-ELCIC Assembly summer 2022. Pat Lovell, ELCIC representative to CoGS, described her church as fully on board with the dialogue, supported by National Bishop Susan Johnson.

The Rev. Eileen Scully, director of Faith, Worship, and Ministry (FWM) commended to CoGS the entirety of the FWM Committee Report. She spoke to council on the document that formed the appendix to the report, which concerns Eucharistic practice and sacramental theology.

After the beginning of lockdown in March, governments ordered no celebrations of the Eucharist in churches to stop the spread of COVID-19. Anglicans initially viewed measures such as eschewal of the common cup as temporary. As time passed, Scully began to receive emails and phone calls about Eucharistic worship from people of all orders asking how they might provide the sacraments if people could not gather, the feasibility of virtual communion, etc. The primate asked Scully to write a short opinion piece to respond to a statement of the House of Bishops in Ontario.

While proper authority in authorization of the Eucharist resides with the diocesan bishop, Scully increasingly found it difficult not to engage in conversation about the theology of the Eucharist. She immersed herself in discussions online and found considerable debate: criticism of directives to stop the Eucharist, defences of the virtual Eucharist, commentary on the idea of spiritual communion, and liturgies for home agape meals. She summarized some of the core arguments she saw and wrote a summary paper with questions attached for the FWM Committee.

Inspired by the Rev. Canon Donna Joy in Winnipeg—who had invited the FWM director

to join an online group engaged in conversations about what it meant to live as a Eucharistic community—Scully made a proposal to the FWM committee to invite diverse Anglican leaders from each ecclesiastical province to write on the Eucharist. She asked each to spend time in prayer and consideration on the most critical theological questions regarding the suspension of Eucharistic celebrations.

As a result, 43 papers from Anglican leaders on this topic have now been collected, with several more papers set to be added including a number by Indigenous Anglicans. With the help of web manager Brian Bukowski and communications manager Alicia Brown from the General Synod communications staff, a website is now in development that will compile and organize the articles according to different categories. The papers will be made available online in the coming weeks, with FWM welcoming any feedback.

Council adjourned for the day at 4 p.m.