

# COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Thursday, November 7, 2019

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

## **Smudging**

The first meeting of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) for the 2019-2022 triennium began with a smudging ceremony. A cultural practice rooted in Indigenous tradition, smudging involves the burning of sacred medicine to create a smoke bath meant to purify a space, cleanse the spirit, bring clarity to the mind and connect people to the Creator.

## **Opening Eucharist and Commissioning**

Council members held an opening worship service and Eucharist. The new council for the triennium was officially commissioned.

## **Orders of the Day**

Cynthia Haines-Turner, co-chair of the planning and agenda team, read out the Orders of the Day.

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

## **Opening Formalities**

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, introduced council members from each ecclesiastical province, General Synod support staff and media. She noted that the dioceses of Toronto and Niagara were holding their diocesan synods, and as a result some members from these dioceses were absent.

Two motions were put before the council on approval of the minutes for previous meetings and the agenda for the current meeting. Both were carried.

### **Resolution**

That the minutes of the meeting of the Council of General Synod from March 14-17, 2019 and July 16, 2019 be approved.

### **Resolution**

That the agenda for this meeting be approved.

## **Primate's Remarks**

The primate welcomed council members to the first CoGS of the new triennium. She noted the chosen theme of the triennium: "A Changing Church, A Searching World, A Faithful God." That theme, Archbishop Nicholls said, sums up both the challenges and the possibilities that the church will be encountering during these three years.

There is no question that the church is changing, the primate said, in reference to the first part of the theme. She acknowledged forthcoming statistics that point to a decline in membership and finances for the church. Such facts, however, would come as no surprise to those in the room who have witnessed aging congregations, depopulating rural areas and "a society around us that frankly believes we are irrelevant." A decline in resources for the

ministries of General Synod has accompanied these trends.

The Anglican Church of Canada is also changing in terms of how and when worship happens, Nicholls said. Sunday is no longer the preserve of Christians alone. Patterns of morning prayer and celebration of the Eucharist are shifting, as people often gather whenever a priest is available. While this shift may not be new to isolated and rural areas in the country, it is new for the many urban areas in southern Canada situated along the U.S. border. The church is seeing many other forms of ministry, such as non-stipendiary clergy. All forms of ministry are being explored in new ways, and new models are being tested.

"We are changing," Nicholls said. "In order to find ways to engage the life of faith with the realities of our current world, we are also changing in how we engage discipleship." She pointed to new forms of discipleship and new resources, such as the *Christian Foundations* small group resource from Wycliffe College, and the practice of gospel-based discipleship that have "transformed Indigenous communities" and have been used extensively in other parts of the church. Finally, the church was changing in its relationship to its Indigenous members through the approval by General Synod for a self-determining Indigenous church within the Anglican Church of Canada, and resulting changes in its governance structures. As the church changes, the primate said, Anglicans must pay attention to those changes and consider how we will be faithful to the gospel in response to them.

Moving on to the second part of the theme, "A Searching World," Nicholls said that despite the decline in church membership, we still face a world that is searching for meaning. "The gospel is and will always be relevant to human life because it comes from the creator of human

life," she said. Those who have left the church or never come to church have not abandoned the search for life and meaning, but many do not believe church is a place to explore those questions. The primate recalled stories of newcomers entering the church to satisfy their curiosity. "There is a freshness to their questions," she said, and an opportunity for the church to explore our faith in new ways.

Life questions related to suffering, human dignity, love and purpose remain potent, Nicholls added. The world is searching for ways to engage the big questions and concerns of our lives in ways that do not lead to division, violence and polarization. There is a need to confront climate change and issues of social justice. The church has a role in responding to those questions, advancing love and forgiveness to help the world. In the face of the church's decline and expressing faith in new ways, the primate said, there is one constant guarantee: that God is and always will be faithful. Hence the final element of the triennial theme: "A Faithful God."

"We do not face our challenges alone," the primate said, but in community and with the promise of God's grace. "We go like the Israelites, trusting the one who leads us. That journey was not without its challenges and its mutinies, and ours will be no less challenging. But the God who brought the Israelites into the promised land is the God who leads us."

Members of the present CoGS, she said, are called to bring forward the work of the General Synod. Key responsibilities will include a constitutional governance review, advancing the self-determining Indigenous church and the work of various committees. Nicholls asked members to listen closely to each other, seeking paths of common action.

One particular area the primate said she wished

to address as a church, in committees and among management staff is dismantling racism—an issue she had focused on in the diocese of Huron before stepping down as bishop, and one that Nicholls believes is at the heart of the challenges facing the church. It is “at the heart of our relationship with Indigenous peoples in this country,” embedded in “laws and the ways we have worked together.” But Nicholls had also seen it expressed in the church’s work with refugees. She had seen it in the pain among clergy of colour, who each answered her question “Have you been a victim of racism in our church?” with an affirmative nod. She had seen it in clergy who were not selected for positions they were “qualified and gifted for.” In such cases, the only reason Nicholls could discern for their not being chosen is a “hidden streak of racism that lives in each of us.”

“I am sure that at times I act and speak as racist, because I am white, I am privileged, I have had all the benefits of being in power in this country,” the primate said. She urged the church to “unpack what that has meant, and how that has shaped us and how it spills out in little ways”—not just on an individual basis, but through collective church projects such as the Racial Justice Charter, which she and National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Mark MacDonald would be discussing later at the present meeting. The primate asked CoGS to “commit to beginning that work, because it is work that will require painful self-examination individually and corporately,” and to commit to it across the country and in work with the self-determining Indigenous church. Such self-examination would be crucial in discerning what the Anglican Church of Canada is called to do and be—for the sake of the church, in its partnerships with others, and for the sake of its place within the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Shifting to more “prosaic” matters, the primate said she had now been working in the General Synod office in Toronto for more than a month and was getting established there. Her work pattern would see her working from home in London for one day a week and then in Toronto for the remaining days. This approach to work would provide her with the concentrated time for the amount of writing expected of a primate, but it would also support her preferred form of “self-care,” music, allowing her to sing in her local choir.

Nicholls has begun travelling through Canada as primate, as well. In the weeks after the present meeting, she plans to visit the Territory of the People and the diocese of Quebec. The primate will also follow the example of her predecessor, Archbishop Fred Hiltz, by meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury in December, sharing the work of the Anglican Church of Canada coming out of General Synod.

The primate ended her remarks by inviting members to ask questions, and she said she would be open to any more throughout the council’s time together. Harkening back to Hiltz’s favoured phrase of “our beloved church,” Nicholls said that those at council would not be present were it not for their love of the church and their desire to see it grow and do God’s work. “So,” she concluded, “let’s get to work.”

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

Judith Moses, chair of the nominating committee, presented the lists of nominees for each CoGS committee. These included:

- Resolutions Committee, chaired by Prolocutor Karen Egan. Nominees: Vice Chancellor Ann Bourke, the Rt. Rev. David Edwards (Canada), the Rev. Marnie Peterson (B.C. and Yukon)
- Handbook Concerns Committee, chaired

by Chancellor David Jones. Nominees: Vice Chancellor Ann Bourke, the Ven. Alan Perry

- Expenditures Committee. Nominees: Ann Cumyn (Canada), the Rt. Rev. Joseph Royal (Rupert's Land)
- Anglican Award of Merit Committee, chaired by General Secretary Michael Thompson. Nominees: the Rt. Rev. Andrew Asbil (Ontario), Canon (lay) Ian Alexander (B.C. and Yukon), Margaret Jenniex (Canada), Major the Rev. Dennis Newhook (Anglican Military Ordinariate), Canon Murray Still (Rupert's Land)

### Group Norms

Egan introduced a discussion in which each table held a conversation about norms of conduct they would like to see introduced for CoGS meetings, to be incorporated into official documents for council. The prolocutor encouraged members to suggest norms that had worked for them in the past.

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

### Bible Study

Council members began the afternoon with Bible study focused on Luke 24:13-21, which details the appearance of Jesus on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. Cynthia Haines-Turner introduced the passage and asked table groups to consider three questions:

- What in the reading made you stop and think?
- When has a sudden, unexpected change evoked despair or shock?
- How did you find hope in the midst of those emotions?

Following table group discussions, Haines-Turner ended the study with a prayer.

### Marketplace Sessions

Council dispersed for marketplace sessions meant to orient them to CoGS, breaking into two groups that attended one of two workshops in turn.

One workshop focused on structures of the Anglican Church of Canada. The other centred on the governance manual, as well as providing an introduction to Church House and governance legislation.

### Discernment and Deciding at CoGS

Primate Linda Nicholls spoke to council after they re-gathered on the subject of discernment and decision-making at CoGS.

Nicholls noted that the system of work at CoGS and General Synod is based in large measure on the parliamentary system, the language and rules of which can be very complex and intimidating to newcomers. Some know the system better than others. "We also know what happens at the end of a very painful decision, when we end up with what feels like winners and losers," the primate said. Everyone who attended General Synod 2016 "knows that everyone ended up on both sides at some point," she said, referring to a voting error during the first vote to amend the marriage canon. Small margins of decision can often leave people feeling like they were not heard. Are there other ways, the primate asked, of making decisions that better reflect the nature of the church and the gospel?

One such method, Nicholls said, is the "consensus" decision-making model practiced by the World Council of Churches, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa, the Uniting Church in Australia and KAIROS—and which has been practiced by Quakers for more than 300 years. The goal of this method is to get to what is described as an overall "sense of the meeting." Elements of the model include careful

listening, summarizing what others have said, attending to the emotions of those involved, creatively weaving varied points of view together and working peacefully through conflict.

Such an approach, the primate suggested, would lead to higher-quality decisions, improved creativity, a greater level of commitment to decisions and placing a higher value on cooperation, mutual trust, community and fairness. Discussion would focus on presenting and clarifying issues and seeking what is needed to find the best proposal possible.

Decisions can occur in one of three ways:

- a unanimous decision;
- a small number of dissenters choosing to “stand aside” once they are heard and to support the outcome; or
- recognition that a consensus cannot be achieved and further exploration must take place.

Facilitation is a key element of this process, the primate added. To make a decision, facilitators must work to balance voices so everyone is heard; seek input from quieter individuals, keep time and stick to the agenda, clarify muddy statements, identify common threads and summarize agreements and disagreements. Different methods exist for identifying readiness to make a decision, such as raising hands, using coloured cards or spatial movements.

In the present triennium, Nicholls said, CoGS would be using coloured cards to help make decisions. Council members then received three cards each: red, yellow and green. During discussion, each card would have the following meaning:

- Red: Stop! I think we are off topic or

need a break, or I need to ask about process.

- Yellow: I need clarification or I think I can clarify.
- Green: I have a comment or I have a question.

When making a decision, the cards would have the following meanings:

- Red: I want a better way, *and* I am willing to help create it.
- Yellow: I can accept this proposal.
- Green: I agree with this proposal.

The important thing to remember, the primate said, was that the consensus model and use of the coloured cards was about listening for the sense of the meeting—that is, the sense of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit in council members’ hearts and minds, informed by Scripture and shaped by prayer and community.

### **Jubilee Commission**

Judith Moses, chair of the Jubilee Commission, presented an updated report to CoGS on the work of the commission. She noted that former commission member Jim Boyles had stepped aside and that Archbishop Mark MacDonald was now attending meetings.

Moses provided a background on the commission and its mandate: “to propose a just, sustainable and equitable funding base for the self-determining Indigenous Anglican church.” That process involves examining historic and current funds made available for Indigenous ministry at various levels of the church’s structure, assessing current funds designated to Indigenous programming and assessing broader property questions. She drew the attention of CoGS to the new logo for the Jubilee Commission, the design of which incorporates colours representing different

Indigenous nations as well as the blue of the Métis flag.

The work plan for the Jubilee Commission looks at three broad components: historical funding trends, current resource requirements to bring parity to the Indigenous church and projected resource requirements for a vibrant future Indigenous church. That work will begin with planning, research, and the gathering of information and data. Commission members will then carry out consultations with dioceses, review and analyze their collected material, and report on different options by 2021. Early recommendations could emerge before then for critical issues.

Thus far, the commission has held three meetings using the video conference software Zoom, during which they developed their draft work plan, set out guiding principles, discussed key issues and scoped out initial background research work. Face-to-face meetings take place less often due to cost, but the first in-person meeting of the commission is being planned to take place in an Indigenous community in Manitoba. Looking ahead, the Jubilee Commission will be assessing its membership and skill needs, collecting information and data, examining structural issues (e.g. structural impediments to financial flows for the Indigenous church), informing and engaging the church on its work, and undertaking the consultations.

Moses concluded by declaring the view of the commission that "a vibrant Indigenous church is integral to the strategic goals of the larger church," and that "commission work goes to the heart of the future of the entire church itself." Council members asked questions. Primate Nicholls said that CoGS looked forward to hearing more about the Jubilee Commission and how dioceses would respond to the project.

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

### **General Synod 2019 Resolution C004**

Council resumed in the evening by looking at Resolution C004 on the climate emergency, which had originally been scheduled for a vote at General Synod but was unable to proceed then due to time constraints. Karen Egan introduced the text of the resolution, which she noted was now dated in some respects. For example, the resolution calls on dioceses and parishes to support and participate in the global climate justice rallies which took place in September 2019.

CoGS member Scott Potter put forward an amendment to the original motion, seconded by council member Lyds Keesmaat-Walsh, which revised and updated its language. Council debated the proposed amendment and its wording. In discussing and voting on the amendment, members used their coloured cards for the first time. CoGS voted in favour of the amendment and then passed the amended resolution.

#### **Resolution**

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod:

1. Encourage Anglicans, individually and corporately, to advocate for action on the climate emergency by all members of the municipal, provincial, and federal governments as a priority.
2. Encourage dioceses and parishes to initiate, support, and participate in climate justice rallies and other actions as necessary to encourage individual, collective, and governmental action to end the human contribution to climate change.

## **Relationship Building**

Members of the new CoGS next participated in some lighthearted activities to help build rapport and relationships.

The primate introduced the first activity by noting that she enjoyed camping in the wilderness, far from modern conveniences such as outhouses. Each table group received a roll of toilet paper. As they passed the roll around the table, each member took off the number of squares that they believed they would need if they were on a camping trip. For each toilet paper square, they had to tell their table group one thing about themselves.

Monique Stone, co-chair of the planning and agenda team, asked council members to stand up for the second activity and find someone they didn't know who was not at their table. In the course of five minutes, members would get to know the person they talked to, with the goal of then being able to introduce this person to someone else.

In the third activity, Stone organized CoGS members in two parallel lines facing each other. Members in one line took a good look at the person across from them, before turning around and looking away as members in the other line changed three things about themselves. Those in the first line then turned back and tried to figure out what the person across from them had changed. Each line then reversed roles and performed the activity again.

Stone tied the last activity to "A Changing Church," part of the theme of the triennium. Sometimes, she said, change can be obvious. Other times, change can be so subtle you barely know it. The point of this activity was to build on relationships in which members must learn to build trust and intimacy and learn from each other.

## **Compline**

Council members concluded the day with compline, or night prayer.

*Members enjoyed an evening social from 8:45 p.m. until 11 p.m.*