

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Sunday, November 7, 2021

Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered together at 10 a.m. ET in person at Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga, Ont. and online via Zoom.

Worship—Eucharist

The opening worship and Eucharist included a sermon by Bishop Andrew Asbil.

Strategic Planning Working Group

The Strategic Planning Working Group (SPWG) chair Judith Moses, member Canon (lay) Ian Alexander, and fellow member and congregational development consultant Janet Marshall presented feedback from council to the SPWG presentation the previous day.

They described 2019-2022 as a transitional triennium, building a bridge from Vision 2019 to General Synod 2022 and beyond. There were many moving pieces during this transition, including Sacred Circle, dismantling colonialism and racism, the Jubilee Commission, communications plan, and uncertainty about the future. Much will continue to develop and transform past 2022. But as the SPWG members presented some of council's responses, Alexander noted, "It really suggests that there is a convening role for the national church in bringing all this together."

Council members outlined current work in their dioceses around each of the five transformative aspirations that make up the strategic plan.

1. Inviting and deepening life in Christ

- Diocesan "missional coaches" for

parishes

- Diocesan "Faith Horizons" initiative
- Diocesan/bishop's "Making Disciples" Commission
- Diocesan "Revive" program/EFM
- Lay training for leading daily worship and prayers
- Faith formation resources for parishes; online Alpha courses; book and Bible studies
- Flexible clergy training with theological colleges/new collaborations with dioceses
- National Church/The Episcopal Church/Communion Office

2. Intentionally dismantling colonialism and being passionately inclusive

- Diocesan Dismantling Racism training—several
- Indigenous awareness training/Sacred Circle and Covenant: a new walk of dismantling and healing
- Rupert's Land "B15" resolution: post-colonial governance
- Work with Black Anglicans of Canada
- Apology to LGBTQ2S+
- Synod motion to tithe 10% MAF fund to reconciliation
- Look to other organizations ahead of us; look to the Ordinariate

3. Mutual interdependence with Sacred Circle

- Working closely with Indigenous bishops and parishes
- Deep respect for voices and experiences
- Acknowledging dual citizenship, not

- leaving the Anglican Church of Canada
- Use of gospel-based discipleship
- Diocesan Missioner for Indigenous Justice
- Responding to residential schools discoveries
- Blanket exercise
- Voices, language, dress/vestments being celebrated
- Look to relationships internationally, e.g. Maori
- Resources for Mission's work on raising financial support

4. Steward God's creation and attend to the well-being of humankind

- Local initiatives, e.g. green audits, community gardens, heat subsidies, solar panels, recycling, etc.
- Work around housing and food security
- Season of Creation initiatives; Bishop's Committee on Creation
- Partnering with secular organizations in the community
- Archbishop Mark MacDonald is at COP26
- Constant advocacy about land extraction
- Support we give to respond to crises internationally

5. Live in relationship with each other

- Podcasts on ecumenism
- Regional ecumenical ministry organization
- Local ecumenical and interfaith initiatives; we've been doing this for years. Very important in small and rural communities
- Ecumenical projects on specific subjects, e.g. anti-racism
- Demonstrations of solidarity with Jewish and Muslim faith groups
- Companion diocese, support for missions elsewhere
- Work with refugees

SPWG consultations will continue between now and General Synod 2022. Groups taking part include ACIP, the Anti-Racism Task Force, Governance Working Group, coordinating committees, the Jubilee Commission, Apportionment Working Group, reconvened listening groups, provincial synods and diocesan councils.

Decisions made at General Synod will set the course for the 2022-2025 triennium, while the election of a new CoGS will mean a passing of the torch to new members. Implementing the strategic plan in the next triennium will require a new implementation team, workbook for dioceses and parishes, more listening and learning, CoGS' leadership and engaging the five transformational aspirations.

Table groups spent 12 minutes in discussion answering two questions on bridging leadership across trienniums:

- What message would you give to the next CoGS about leading in this transitional time—when so much is in motion and nothing is clear yet?
- What you learned about leadership during times of change that you could share?

Some of the responses table groups presented spoke about the need to keep listening to people who were consulted and keep them informed, and to take concrete action as a national church rather than offering mere words. Members tuning in via Zoom said CoGS could be a hub that reflects the larger body of the church, and reflected appreciation for the Governance Working Group and how they are helping support the work of strategic planning.

The SPWG posed another question to table groups: What decisions about vision and

strategic planning does CoGS want from General Synod in 2022? Council members responded by saying the first meeting of the triennium had to be a productive one. They highlighted the importance of quickly bringing people up to speed and developing new leaders. One suggestion that appeared popular was to have a couple of Zoom meetings for the new CoGS before their first formal meeting in the fall.

Next steps for the SPWG between now and July 2022 will include continuing consultations, seeking assistance and input with drafting and reviewing language for the final report. The report to General Synod will be finalized for the approval of CoGS in March 2022. The SPWG will produce materials as tools for delegates in advance of General Synod such as a "workbook", podcast, video, and online briefings. They will also develop draft resolutions for General Synod and develop recommendations for a possible implementation process of the strategic plan.

In the case of CoGS, they said, council members at their March meeting should endorse and send the final SPWG report to General Synod, finalize and affirm the draft resolutions for General Synod, and commend to General Synod the SPWG's recommendations for implementation as a "gift" to the next CoGS.

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

Surprised by the Spirit Video #5

CoGS watched a fifth video showing the response of Anglicans to *Surprised by the Spirit*.

General Secretary's Report

The Ven. Alan T. Perry, general secretary, opened his report by answering a question raised by one of the council members on what happened to money that was contributed toward the residential school settlement.

Anglican entities, which included General Synod, the Missionary Society and dioceses, collectively contributed several million dollars towards the settlement. When the Roman Catholic Church did not meet its commitment, there was an abatement and some of the money donated by Anglicans flowed back to the church from the government. The money that came back has been distributed in proportion to various Anglican entities. All been used for Indigenous ministry in one form or another, Perry said. Examples include the Anglican Healing Fund, the creation of the reconciliation animator position, and into dioceses for Indigenous ministry.

Perry described some of the business of General Synod and how it operates first and foremost as a legislative body. The way to take action at General Synod, he noted, is through resolutions, which are presented, debated, put to a vote and either defeated or passed. Sometimes diocesan send General Synod memorials, which are documents that express their views on a certain matter. "Those are wonderful and important," Perry said. "But sometimes dioceses or bishops say, 'We sent a memorial, what happened to it?' We ask, 'Did you send a resolution?' If you want General Synod to take a memorial somewhere, you need to include a resolution with it as well."

Sometimes the church does not entirely grasp the meaning of new information, the general secretary said. He cited the example of recent survey results on how COVID-19 has affected Anglicans, discussed at CoGS on Friday. "Sometimes our grasp is not quite where God is trying to take us," Perry said. "I think it's our task as Christians and leaders of the church to realize that sometimes we haven't quite figured it out yet, despite having some great minds and very helpful insights into what God is doing. But God is waiting to surprise us a little bit more." He cited the work of CoGS in preparing for the 2022-25 triennium and trying to imagine what

that will look like. "I can tell you that God in that triennium will do more than I can ask or imagine, and more than ... we can collectively ask or imagine," Perry said.

The general secretary's report also shed some light on how Church House is functioning these days. Up until the summer of 2021, Perry said, the General Synod office had been in a period where anyone who wanted to come in needed permission due to health concerns, e.g. staff who wanted to work in the office. In the summer, that policy changed and staff no longer needed permission to come in. Church House in turn has begun to see more people return. Visitors are also allowed to attend for work reasons such as meetings. Both staff and visitors must present proof of vaccination, and Church House is keeping a list for contact tracing of everyone who comes into the building.

Church House has also re-opened its chapel, and recently held the first worship service there in the 19 months since the pandemic first hit Canada. Like the building as a whole, some space restrictions still remain. Perry emphasized the church's duty of care to make sure everyone who enters Church House is safe and feels safe. "I can say confidently that we are doing everything we can to make people feel safe," he said. "And those who come in seem to feel safe."

Guided Discussion

CoGS members had the opportunity to respond and discuss their experiences at this point in the triennium. During 15 minutes of discussion, small groups conversed about how each member was feeling about their contributions to the council, anything they felt needed to be addressed, and whether they were ready for the next meeting.

Key Messages

Four members of CoGS—two who had attended the meeting in person at the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre and two who had attended online via Zoom—described their experience of the council's first hybrid meeting. Each boiled down the key messages they hoped to convey to "headlines" for the church.

Michael Siebert (online) spoke about the aspirations of the SPWG. He appreciated the careful pace of these deliberations and the time it takes to work through these issues. At its best, he said, the slow process of crafting a strategic plan testifies that those in charge are being careful, respecting the process, doing their due diligence, and are sensitive to changing conditions such as COVID-19. "There is space to reflect one's reservations, and I would like to think we're learning to hear reservations better," Siebert said. He suggested a headline for this achievement might read: "Against odds, CoGS makes progress as it battles in the trenches."

As a "Zoomer", i.e. a member attending online, Siebert said he was extremely impressed with how CoGS was able to pull off the hybrid meeting. He credited this success to web manager Brian Bukowski, who provided different camera views, sent members to breakout rooms—and when Queen of Apostles experienced a brief power outage on Friday afternoon, gave council members regular updates and got things working again soon. Siebert said it felt like he was present at the meeting, but acknowledged that some informal conversations can't be held on Zoom. He suggested another headline: "Virtual CoGS good, but can't beat the real thing."

Ann Cumyn (in person) said that from the moment she walked into Queen of Apostles, she had been impressed by the care given to safety. COVID has not prevented CoGS from meeting or carrying out its work. Small group discussions of four had made decisions deeper

and members “felt like a family, which I did not feel at previous CoGS meetings in person.” The council dealt with some important issues. She was relieved that the Governance Working Group had put forward proposals that she could support. However, Cumyn was not satisfied that there was enough time provided for the presentations by the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP) and Council of the North.

The film shown during ACIP’s presentation, *Reclaiming Our Spirituality*, on the history and meaning of Indigenous self-determination earned high praise from Cumyn, who felt the film should be widely shown to communities (note: the film is available free to watch on Anglican.ca). Summarizing her thoughts on the hybrid meeting, she said that while CoGS was able to work in spite of COVID, she did feel that the council had been cut in half. “We saw people from time to time,” Cumyn said of those attending via Zoom. “They’re sometimes seen and sometimes not seen.”

Jody Butler Walker (online) offered the headline “Stronger together” to describe the hybrid meeting. “The work of ACIP and Sacred Circle continues to show how we can walk side by side,” she said. Other important examples strengthening the council as it moves forward are the work of Faith, Worship and Ministry, such as the emerging *Pastoral Liturgies for Journeys of Gender Transition and Affirmation*, and the work of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations in advancing Anglican-Lutheran-Moravian full communion.

The second headline Walker suggested is “Here we all are, inclusivity in action.” Her experience of the meeting started when she received a parcel from executive secretary for governance Shannon Cottrell containing a new lunch bag—which all CoGS members had received, whether attending online or in person. “Already before

the meeting started, I was feeling part of it and engaged by this extra effort,” Walker said.

Having the Rev. Monique Stone as online leader was also helpful, and Walker enjoyed the breakout rooms on Zoom. The idea of “inclusivity in action”, she said, also speaks to work by staff and others in preparing the hybrid meeting. She thanked Brian Bukowski; Josie De Lucia, executive assistant to the general secretary and travel and venue manager; Cottrell and everyone else who worked hard to put the event together. At least one other person, Walker said, had said it would be good if members were able to continue having the option of using Zoom for CoGS, so that people can still participate even if they can’t attend the meeting in person.

Judith Moses (in person) put forward the headline “Not so surprised by the Spirit”, a play on the *Surprised by the Spirit* initiative. “When you bring out a group of Anglicans together who give up their Friday, Saturday and Sunday to be together, you know you’re in a special group of people,” Moses said. “I’m not surprised by what I saw here and the spirit being within this room and online... I think we did as well as we could have under circumstances to feel like a cohesive group.”

However, Moses felt that there was some unfinished business in the sense that ACIP co-chair Murray Still was cut a bit short in his presentation on ACIP and Indigenous Ministries. She also felt that council did not have enough time to consider the resolution it passed affirming support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #6, which calls for the repeal of section 43 of the Criminal Code—a law that justifies the use of physical force by parents and teachers against children. “I didn’t think that we had enough time to reflect on what that really meant and what it meant to Indigenous people,” Moses

said.

"It wasn't just a piece of business that we accomplished yesterday," she added. "It's a very important signal to Indigenous people in this country that we recognize what has transpired and that we remember these are all individuals. There isn't an Indigenous person in this country who wouldn't be untouched by that resolution from yesterday." Moses recounted how her own grandfather was deaf in one ear after being beaten by an Anglican nun for speaking his traditional language in a playground. For the rest of his life, she said, her grandfather lived with a disability caused by the church.

Moses asked council to hold a moment of silence to remember the children who suffered from the residential school system. After the silence, she told CoGS, "Thank you everyone for helping us to dignify our decision from yesterday."

Partner Reflections

Canon (lay) Noreen Duncan, representative to CoGS from The Episcopal Church (TEC), spoke via Zoom to offer the first of two partner reflections. She brought greetings and love from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. "This has been quite an unusual exercise," Duncan said of the hybrid meeting, "though we have been meeting by Zoom since last March." Among highlights of the meeting, Duncan cited the opening address of Primate Linda Nicholls, from whom she took away important observations such as the rediscovery of the daily office which has helped Anglicans meet spiritual needs in a different way. Duncan was also impressed by the five *Surprised by the Spirit* videos.

At their last executive council meeting, Episcopalians had prayed with Canadian Anglicans on the discovery of burial sites at residential school sites. "Our hearts break with you," Duncan said. "We have had our own sense

of not being as Christian as we should be. We're just becoming aware, partly learning from the Anglican Church of Canada ... spending so much time working with Indigenous intergenerational trauma, becoming familiar with that language. As a mother and as a fellow Christian, my heart bleeds with you."

The Anglican Church of Canada's welcoming of Moravians is also significant for TEC, which just celebrated 10 years of full communion with the Moravians this year. "It's going to be a worthwhile relationship," Duncan said of Moravians joining in full communion. "We're no longer partners; we're all one body with the Lutherans." The Episcopal representative highlighted the work of the SPWG and the presence of Archbishop Mark MacDonald at COP26. "That is something we really have to work with, that God did not really make us in charge of other parts of creation," Duncan said. "We're intentional stewards of creation."

In her own ministry with TEC, Duncan is currently dealing with the issue of reparations, as recompense for centuries of enslavement and oppression of people of African descent in the United States. Bishop William Stokes in the Episcopal diocese of New Jersey has appointed Duncan as convener of his reparations task force. Episcopalians are seeking to discern "how we as a church could [offer] recompense for our complicity in the oppression of Africans who helped build this country over the last 400 years," Duncan said. An Oct. 30 rally in New Jersey further raised the subject of reparations.

Duncan's anti-racism work has also included running virtual training courses, which has included some Canadian students. She reiterated her hopes for greater diversity in the Council of General Synod as part of its efforts to combat systemic racism and advocate for racial justice: "I'm praying with you that you can see a way to bring into the leadership of CoGS

descendants of Africa, the Caribbean and Asia.”

Pat Lovell, ELCIC representative to CoGS who was attending in person at Queen of Apostles, offered the second partner reflection. She brought greetings on behalf of the church’s Lutheran partners. Though it was good to be physically present with some council members for their time together, Lovell said, “I do look forward to the time when we can all be together in person and in the same room.” But she also found the hybrid meeting’s preparations were very well done, given the challenges of the pandemic. Instructions were very clear, thoughtful and accommodating to reflect those in different time zones, which Lovell said showed creativity and adaptability. She offered kudos to the Planning and Agenda Team.

Lovell thought the primate’s opening remarks acknowledged new ways of worship as both a challenge and opportunity. The same is true for Lutherans, she said. The primate’s “message to trust God to lead the way and remain open to what God is calling us to do in this time of changing possibilities” was, for Lovell, a message that was both inspirational and timely.

She found it comforting to hear that the SPWG is considering their work as a time of transition, learning and discernment. The Dismantling Racism Task Force, which Lovell is a part of, similarly realizes the vastness of the challenge it faces and that the transformative change they seek will take time. The ELCIC currently has national task forces on addressing racism, ableism and issues facing LGBTQ2S+ people, while being mindful that no group is monolithic. “This work will take time, patience and prayer,” Lovell said.

As Anglicans and Lutherans continue down this road, Lovell said, she was acutely aware that her time in service with CoGS and the ELCIC

National Council will conclude at the 2022 Assembly. At that point, she noted, only one person from the Black community will be left on CoGS: Noreen Duncan. Neither will be there be any Black person on the ELCIC National Church Council after Lovell departs, unless a new person is elected. “I want to emphasize again that we are richer together when we have more diversity and representation from everyone,” she said.

Lovell found the *Reclaiming Our Spirituality* video “inspirational and informative” and that the CoGS presentation on ACIP and Indigenous Ministries highlighted collective efforts along the journey towards Indigenous self-determination. “I hope we will continue to move in positive directions on both the Indigenous front and in dismantling racism,” Lovell said. “It is something that is sorely needed. May God continue to bless us all.”

Closing Remarks

The primate offered brief closing remarks. She thanked Duncan and Lovell for their reflections and for serving as “consistent voices reminding us of things that still lay before us as a council—particularly around diversity and the need to be thinking strategically and urgently, as we prepare for General Synod 2022, of what it will take to change the diversity in this room.” The main movement in that regard will come from dioceses, Nicholls added. She urged council members where they have voice in their dioceses to urge elections and preparation to share the diversity of the church more widely.

Nicholls thanked council for the way in which the meeting had been able to be conducted. Organizers had struggled with the decision for CoGS to be held in-person, totally online, or hybrid and finally decided on the latter, despite having never done it before with so large a group. Whatever the format of the next CoGS meeting in March 2022, the primate said, “we

have learned how to do this, and we will be ready for the final meeting of triennium. It's been a good meeting—a good time to be together in a diverse way.”

Adjournment

The primate ended the meeting with a blessing and dismissal.

Council adjourned at 3 p.m.