

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

Council members gathered at 9 a.m. in Cody Hall at St. Paul's Bloor Street Church in Toronto.

Bible Study and Worship

Sister Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas led an opening Bible study and worship service to start the day. Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) studied the Beatitudes from Matthew 5:1-11 and engaged in Gospel-based discipleship.

Nominating Committee Report

Ms. Cynthia Haines-Turner, deputy prolocutor, presented the nominations for the new working group, formed to assist and provide advice to the Planning and Agenda Team in preparation for the November 2015 and March 2016 meetings of CoGS as it prepares and approves its response to Resolution C003 to be put before General Synod 2016, as well as to the General Synod Planning Committee in matters related to the consideration of the motion to amend the Marriage Canon.

Following the vote, the final working group consisted of:

- Ms. Tannis Webster, representing the ecclesiastical province of Rupert's Land;
- The Rev. Karen Egan, representing the ecclesiastical province of Canada;
- The Rt. Rev. John Chapman, representing the ecclesiastical province of Ontario;
- Mr. Don Wilson, representing the ecclesiastical province of British Columbia and Yukon;
- The Rt. Rev. Linda Nicholls, who served as co-ordinator of the Marriage Commission; and
- One member of the Planning and Agenda team, to be appointed by the group.

Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, suggested that the new

working group meet before the end of the CoGS meeting. Noting that the meeting was ahead of schedule, he moved directly into discussion of the report's draft resolution for possible amendments to Canon XXI to be presented to General Synod in 2016.

Resolution to General Synod

Canon David Jones, chancellor of CoGS, led council members through the text of the draft resolution, which is found in Appendix A of the Commission on the Marriage Canon report.

Under the terms of the draft resolution, General Synod would declare that Canon XXI on Marriage "applies to all person who are duly qualified by civil law to enter into marriage," while amending the canon to make its language gender-neutral.

A "conscience clause" describes conditions under which a minister should not solemnize a marriage between persons of the same sex, which include:

- If the diocesan synod has enacted a Canon to prohibit the solemnization of marriages between persons of the same sex in the churches and other places of worship in the diocese by any bishop or clergy member licensed in the diocese;
- If the diocesan bishop has issued a written and public direction prohibiting the solemnization of same-sex marriages in the churches or other places of worship in the diocese by any bishop or clergy member licensed in the diocese; or
- If the congregation has passed a resolution at a duly constituted meeting of the members of the congregation prohibiting the solemnization of same-sex marriages in the congregation's church or other place of worship.

If none of the conditions apply and the minister declines to solemnize the marriage for reasons of conscience, they should refer the same-sex couple to another priest. The resolution would come into effect on the first day of January after being passed by General Synod at Second Reading.

CoGS members asked a number of questions to clarify the text of the draft resolution. Responding to a query from one CoGS member, Canon Jones said that if a priest from one diocese where the diocesan synod has chosen not to solemnize same-sex marriage travels to another diocese, the priest may—with the permission the bishop of the second diocese—solemnize such a marriage, since the bishop of the first diocese has no authority there.

Another council member asked whether the resolution as drafted would continue to be examined by the working group and subject to further change. Canon Jones noted that while CoGS may amend the draft resolution, it could not do so in a way inconsistent with Resolution C003. He suggested that it would be “unwise and unnecessary” to excessively tamper with the draft resolution, given how much attention was put into it by the commission.

The CoGS member in turn questioned whether the draft version of the resolution might be overly generous with its interpretation of the word “congregation” from C003. However, Canon Jones along with other council members noted that the commission and CoGS were both obliged to be faithful to the wording of C003.

In response to a question about whether General Synod has the inherent jurisdiction to regulate what happens in a congregation, even with respect to a priest and marriage, Canon Jones said he was “absolutely satisfied” that it did. Another CoGS member thanked the commission for the careful wording of the draft resolution. It was important, she added, that the resolution be permissive, but not coercive.

As members broke off into table group discussions, the Primate asked them to consider the values that CoGS might want to keep in mind as it continues

the conversation at the November and March meetings, contemplating how to handle the resolution at the forthcoming General Synod.

Following the discussions, council members presented summaries of the conversations from their tables. One member recounted a philosophical discussion on the conscience clause, noting that dioceses and congregations do not have a “conscience” and therefore cannot be held to such a clause. He wondered if the clause may give too much power to a congregation and that the entire motion could be defeated on that point. Other table groups expressed similar concerns about the possibility of strife over governance issues.

One of the table groups compared General Synod 2007 in Winnipeg to General Synod 2010 in Halifax, praising the latter for its effectiveness in helping delegates learn things, and to appreciate the experience of other human beings and their gifts of difference. They hoped for a similar experience at General Synod 2016. Another table group echoed their concerns by emphasizing the need to have a purposeful outcome at the next General Synod.

Still another group praised the effectiveness of the talking circle format. To avoid polarizing discussion over the motion, they pressed for an emphasis on relationships and building connections between people even as they remained focused on the report.

Offering his own input, the Primate encouraged council members once more to make sure they read the report in its entirety, ponder it, pray about it, and refer others who have questions to the text of the report and summary document. He reminded the council again that the final decision on the resolution would be up to General Synod—but that the resolution that would be sent to General Synod would be one approved by CoGS, which will have additional opportunities at its November and March meetings for extended conversations about the draft resolution.

Comparing the draft resolution to a bottle of fine wine or Scotch, the Primate suggested it would be

best to let it “age” as members take the time to reflect upon the draft for future discussion. He reminded members that any alteration of canon would require a two-thirds majority vote in two successive sessions of General Synod. This prolonged discernment period provides opportunities for referral to diocesan provincial synods, an outcome of which could be memorials to General Synod—formal written statements describing the position taken by bodies such as diocesan synods or the House of Bishops.

Offering an update on an issue raised the previous day, a council member noted that translation of the summary document into Aboriginal syllabic writing could be a considerable task and that not all Indigenous people could read it. A potential alternative would be to record a spoken translation of the summary into Indigenous languages covering certain areas of the country, with areas perhaps to be determined with the assistance of National Indigenous Anglican Bishop Mark MacDonald and the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples.

The council responded favourably to this proposal. Another CoGS member pointed to the need for a similar translation into French.

Council members took a break for coffee from 11:15 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Eucharist

Members re-convened inside St. Paul’s Chapel at 11:30 a.m. for a Eucharist service, which closed out the special meeting of CoGS.