

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Friday, May 7, 2021

An evening worship service took place May 6 in the form of a video featuring Anglicans from across the country. The video was posted on YouTube, Facebook and the Anglican Church of Canada website.

On May 7, members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered together online at 11 a.m. ET via Zoom conference.

Opening Worship

Cynthia Haines-Turner, co-chair of the Planning and Agenda Team, read out the Orders of the Day.

Opening Formalities

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, presented motions to adopt the minutes of the March 2021 CoGS meeting and the agenda for the current meeting. Both were carried.

Primate's Remarks

The primate recalled the slogan chosen at the beginning of the 2019-2022 triennium: "A Changing Church, A Searching World, A Faithful God". She described this slogan as even more relevant now, in a world searching frantically for stability amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. "In the midst of it all," the primate said, "God has been and is faithful." While the world is hopefully moving closer to the end of the pandemic, she added, "for now we are still in the wilderness." Alberta remains in the middle of an "out-of-control third wave" while full stay-at-home orders in Ontario are not likely to be lifted on May 20 as planned.

However, some parts of Canada are relatively COVID-free and not locked down, with Anglicans in some cases able to worship together.

"At different points in the pandemic, new words have gained traction," the primate said. At first it was "pivot", as the world moved many activities online. The new word in recent weeks has been "languishing"—a term to describe growing fatigue with the pandemic and lockdowns. "Rebellion against restrictions is increasing, putting more people at risk," Nicholls said. "Frontline workers are exhausted, putting their lives at risk for people who reject necessary restraints, even as vaccinations ramp up and show promise."

The Anglican family is not immune from such feelings, she noted. Since the last meeting of CoGS, the Anglican Church of Canada has seen the death of retired bishop Michael Bedford-Jones from COVID-19; the Rev. Vivian Seegers was recently in hospital and in critical condition for several days; Bishop Michael Hawkins has been hospitalized twice with COVID-19 and continues to live with lingering side effects. Many leading Indigenous clergy in northern communities have died. Anglicans must continue to draw on a spirit of patience, perseverance and self-sacrifice on behalf of others, Nicholls said—self-sacrifice that is at the core of the Christian faith.

At Church House, the primate said, staff have continued their usual work: advocating for social justice locally and globally, building

partnerships and continuing ecumenical dialogue, engaging in liturgical and pastoral work, and communicating to help keep the church connected. Along with its sister churches, the Anglican Church of Canada has been particularly engaged in advocacy on key issues that have risen in priority due to the pandemic.

Chief among these is the issue of vaccine equity. While the church was grateful that Indigenous communities were prioritized early on, Nicholls said, other communities need support, including workers in crowded factories, those in prison or experiencing homelessness, and migrant and agricultural workers essential to maintaining the food chain. Echoing the words of Archbishop Thabo Makgoba of the diocese of Cape Town, the primate declared: "No one is safe until all are safe." She pointed favourably to the U.S. government issuing a temporary waiver on intellectual property rights to allow vaccines to be produced in countries such as India, and hoped that the Government of Canada would follow the lead of its southern neighbour. Nicholls noted that the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) has set up a vaccine equity fund and joined the "Love My Neighbour" action, a national movement for global vaccine equity inspired by Millennium Kids and supported by UNICEF Canada.

The primate reported that the House of Bishops had met in April and heard a presentation by Robert Heaney on formation for the growing Anglican Communion—helping the bishops reflect on the history of Anglicanism and the contextual expression of it as it was exported around the British Empire. The house had offered its farewell to three bishops: Jenny Andison, who was returning to parish ministry; Jane Alexander, who resigned in April; and Rob Hardwick, who will be retiring at the end of July. New bishops also gathered for orientation. In

just three years, Nicholls said, the house has seen more than 50% of its bishops change. The bishops will need time to meet together in person, she added, to get to know one another, build relationships, and offer mutual support and prayer. An in-person gathering is tentatively planned for September or October, depending on vaccination rollout and case levels across the country.

As the "light at the end of the long pandemic tunnel" approaches, the primate said, the church is inviting Anglicans to share their experiences through the *Surprised by the Spirit* initiative, which would be discussed in more detail later at the meeting.

Nicholls outlined her own preaching and online discussions with parishioners in 14 dioceses since the last gathering of CoGS. She said she was looking forward to upcoming provincial synods and Sacred Circle as the church moves towards its General Synod and Assembly in 2022. She also highlighted Lambeth Awards bestowed upon Canadian Anglicans after Easter. Recipients included:

- Archbishop Colin Johnson and Canon Isaac Kawuki-Mukasa, who received the Cross of St. Augustine recognizing service to the Anglican Communion for their efforts in promoting dialogue among bishops, particularly those of Canada, Africa, Britain and the United States;
- Rupert Lang, director of music and organist at Christ Church Cathedral in Vancouver, who received the Thomas Cranmer Award for Worship; and
- Dr. John Bowen, former director of the Institute for Evangelism at Wycliffe College, who received the Alphege Award for Evangelism and Witness.

"We are blessed indeed with gifted leaders in

our church in many fields," the primate said.

Nicholls concluded on an optimistic note by recalling apple blossoms she had recently come across in her neighbourhood, which she chose to view as a "sign of the hope and fruitfulness that is coming."

Dismantling Racism Task Force

Ryan Weston, lead animator of Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice, presented a motion on appointing another member to the Dismantling Racism Task Force. The motion carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod appoint Marlena Anderson (Territory of the People) to the Dismantling Racism Task Force.

Safe Church Update

General Secretary Alan Perry gave an update on two items related to implementing the *Safe Church Charter*:

- The church's insurer, Ecclesiastical Insurance, has developed an online Safe Church training program and is in the process of making minor tweaks to it. Their hope is to have the program ready sometime in June. CoGS members will receive an email when the online training program is rolled out. The general secretary requested that all CoGS members use the training module as soon as it is available.
- Resolution A128, adopted at General Synod 2019, directs CoGS to review its Safe Church policy base and report back to General Synod in 2022. Perry flagged this item in February as an outstanding deliverable and sought direction from the council on how to follow up this

review.

A number of council members volunteered to help out in a group tasked with reviewing the charter. Nicholls hoped that this group would include one person from each ecclesiastical province. Perry added that the group should review the sexual misconduct policy of General Synod to ensure it reflects the *Safe Church Charter*.

The primate reiterated the importance of this work, the commitment of Anglicans to being a safe church, and the role of CoGS in showing how it will address this as a body together.

Surprised by the Spirit

Council members watched a video in which the primate described the new *Surprised by the Spirit (SBTS)* initiative and its accompanying website spirit.anglican.ca. The Rev. Dr. Eileen Scully, director of Faith, Worship and Ministry, recounted the development during the pandemic of a spiritual formation network, which now consists of approximately 18 people who meet on a monthly basis. *SBTS* was the latest idea of this network.

The Rev. Canon Dawn Davis, part of the spiritual formation network, explained the concept of *SBTS* in more detail. The network during its meetings had been reflecting on what has been happening in the life of the Anglican Church of Canada over the last 18 months—seeing changes, and wondering if this might be the time to pause and take stock. There is a real sense, Davis said, that Anglicans might be more engaged in person in the fall. "Before we run back to all of this," she asked, "is this not a great moment in the life of our community, our country, our church, for each of us to pause and say: What kind of surprises have we engaged with and become more aware of?" Members of the network approached the primate and asked if the wider church might be interested, which

set the stage for the *SBTS* initiative.

SBTS invites Anglicans to gather in conversation and reflect on their experiences during the pandemic, answering the questions: “What surprise do we need to grieve? What surprises do we need to celebrate?” Participants may pray and discuss questions to consider the surprises of the last year during the pandemic and “listen for what the Spirit is telling us about the path ahead.” Anglicans are encouraged to share their reflections and insights—the “Spark” —from their discussions in any format of their choosing. These might include text summaries, photos, videos, poems, songs, artwork, or any other medium through which the Spirit inspires people. Sparks will be posted to the *SBTS* website in Thanksgiving 2021 to help Anglicans “witness the surprises by the Spirit together.”

Davis pointed council to the video they had watched, available on the *SBTS* website, as a resource they could use in their own parishes or in group gatherings to show the context for the project. “This can be an initiative that you can do in your parish, in your committees, in informal gatherings of sojourners who are with you spiritually,” Davis said. “You can bring a couple friends together. We’re not providing a structure for how to do it, just to engage with the questions.” Anglicans can download conversation guides, including a special kids’ version, which include opening prayers and scripture passages to reflect upon and inspire discussion.

The Rev. Dr. Neil Mancor, another member of the spiritual formation network, described his podcast *Pew & Beyond* as an example of another initiative that had come out of the group to foster conversation across the church. Featuring Primate Nicholls as a guest in its first episode, the series over the past year has featured church voices from across Canada. Mancor said it was “so encouraging for me to

have participated in these conversations” and that there “many good news stories from across the country”.

Pew & Beyond airs online every Tuesday at 1 p.m. ET. Mancor invited Anglicans to join the conversation and add their own comments and thoughts. The primate had officially launched *SBTS* on last week’s episode. “We hope that as *Surprised by the Spirit* continues to unfold that this will come back to *Pew & Beyond*, that we’ll be able to share and hear more stories and sparks and be part of this national conversation,” Mancor said.

The Rev. Stephanie London, developer of the *SBTS* kid’s conversation guide, concluded the presentation by encouraging CoGS members to take the project back to their own congregations. Primate Nicholls thanked the spiritual formation network and all who had helped create images and ideas for *SBTS*. “I think this is a time when we need to be encouraged by creativity and resilience,” the primate said. She hoped that CoGS members, as church leaders, would help guide the process and “feed back to us some of what you’re seeing as Sparks, as hopeful moments, and surprising things. Some may be not always be positive. But we’ll know better and have a better picture of our church through this.”

Pension Committee

Bob Boeckner, chair of the Pension Committee, reported that the pension plan was in a “very strong” surplus position. In 2020, the plan reached \$1 billion in assets to support benefits for the first time. The latest numbers, received the morning of the presentation, state that the plan remains above \$1 billion in assets.

“As a result of this good news,” Boeckner said, “we have developed some recommendations to CoGS that improve benefits to beneficiaries.” He put forward three motions related to Canon VIII

and one related to Canon XII. All four carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approve the recommendations of the Pension Committee to make the following amendments effective July 1, 2021.

- Reinstating the unreduced early retirement provision based on 35 years of contributory service for retirees and restoring the pensions to those eligible, who retired since 2015, when this provision was removed.
- Upgrading pensions accrued from 1.8% to 2.0% of pensionable salary, for the years 2010 to 2020 inclusive, for all retired, active and deferred numbers.
- Applying a 5% increase to the total pension accrued to December 31, 2020 for active, deferred and retired members.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approves the recommendation of the Pension Committee to make the amendments to Regulation 5 and Schedule A of the Regulations of Canon VIII ... effective July 1, 2021.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approves the recommendation of the Pension Committee to make the amendments to Regulation 12 of the Regulations of Canon VIII ... effective July 1, 2021.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approves the recommendation of the Pension Committee to approve the changes to Canon XII and Regulations ... effective January 1, 2021.

Members took a 10-minute break.

Insight Sessions

Council split into two breakout rooms to hear each of two speakers in turn: Laurel Parsons, General Synod archivist, and Deborah Barretto, director of Resources for Mission. Both spoke to council members about their respective General Synod ministry.

Members took an hour break for lunch.

Bible Study

Council resumed after lunch with Bible study. Members went into breakout rooms to read and reflect upon Mark 8:22-28, in which Jesus restores the sight of a blind man at Bethsaida.

General Synod 2019 Minutes

General Secretary Perry presented a motion on draft minutes from General Synod 2019, following requests for them to be circulated. The motion carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approves the recommendation of the Pension Committee to approve the changes to Canon XII and Regulations ... effective January 1, 2021.

Members took a five-minute break.

Youth Ministry

Sheilagh McGlynn, animator for youth ministries, introduced the presentation on Youth Ministry with members of the youth secretariat. They sought to highlight some important issues that the secretariat saw as “pitfalls” in the Anglican Church of Canada at the moment regarding youth ministry. Su McLeod, youth engagement coordinator for PWRDF, outlined the historical context for youth ministry in the church stretching back to General Synod 1995 and the trend towards greater coordination of youth ministry at the national level.

Cheryl Kukurudz, youth secretariat member for the ecclesiastical province of Rupert’s Land, then described the current context for youth ministry in the church. The differences in how youth ministry is done from diocese to diocese are vast, Kukurudz said. Many Anglicans are unaware of the national programming for youth (Canadian Lutheran Anglican Youth, or CLAY) or for youth leaders (Stronger Together). There is no network of youth leaders that can connect and support each other, nor a cohesive sense of what youth ministry is or should look like across the country. Youth ministry is not a priority in every diocese, and there is no mechanism to track youth leaders at the national level.

The youth secretariat members posed a number of questions to council, which split into breakout groups to discuss them:

- What does effective youth ministry look like?
- Given the Marks of Mission and the baptismal covenant, how are you living into that covenant with respect to young people? What is stopping you?
- What are ways that the Anglican Church of Canada can fill the gaps that exist across the country when it comes to youth ministry?

Leslie Flynn, youth secretariat members for the Ecclesiastical Province of B.C. and Yukon, thanked members for their feedback and said the secretariat looked forward to reading the responses. She then pointed to a number of successes for youth ministry “despite the gaps”. Anglican participation at CLAY, she noted, grows at every gathering, while the online Stronger Together event had three times the average participation in 2020. Youth leaders maintained inter-diocese connections and many dioceses offer some form of youth programming, often organized by volunteers or a combination of staff and volunteers.

The primate ended the day’s business by leading council members in a prayer.

Council adjourned for the day at 4 p.m.