

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Saturday, May 8, 2021

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

Opening Prayer

The Rev. Louise Peters, chaplain to CoGS, led an opening prayer.

Orders of the Day

The Rev. Monique Stone, co-chair of the Planning and Agenda Team, read out the Orders of the Day.

Dismantling Racism: Sharing Stories

Dr. Martin Brokenleg led a panel on racism in the church, lighting a candle and setting a "prayerful intention" at the outset.

He introduced the three panel members: the Rev. Canon Ginny Doctor, Indigenous Ministries coordinator; Dion Lewis, co-chair of the Anti-Racism Task Force for the diocese of Montreal; and Pastor Chung Yan Lam, incumbent priest for the Anglican parish of Bearbrook, Navan and Blackburn, and Vars Chapel in the diocese of Ottawa. Each panel member spoke about their own personal experiences with racism.

Martin Brokenleg

Brokenleg began by sharing three experiences from his own life. His family have been Anglicans since missionaries first came. Brokenleg's grandfather on his mother's side was a medicine man who became Episcopalian. On his mother's side, Episcopalian missionaries had arrived a bit sooner, but the rule at the time was that Indigenous people could not enter the

local church when white people were inside. They could crack the door open and listen, but not enter the building. On the first Sunday of the month, only when the white people left could Lakota people receive communion at the door.

One snowy morning, standing on the church steps, a "nice white man" came over and said that the Lakota could come inside his Baptist church, even sit in the front row. "We had never been to their church because we were Anglicans," Brokenleg said. From then on, his mother always loved Baptist hymns, until her dying day. But because the family was Anglican, they still stood on the Anglican door one Sunday each month to receive communion there. Growing up, Brokenleg attended a Roman Catholic church with his family for several years, after the Jesuits said they could sit anywhere in the building if they went to the Catholic Mass. Being Episcopalian, however, his family did not take communion there.

After his own ordination, Brokenleg became the first Lakota priest to serve a predominantly white congregation. He recalled that there had been some protests in the community to try and keep Lakota people out of the congregation, but found that the parish—a "foundering community at the time"—was very welcoming, though "some people had left knowing I was coming." While the congregation generally "meant well", Brokenleg said, he recalled the first wedding he was set to preside over. The head of the altar guild, a "kind, gentle" white-haired lady, approached him and

noted that the bride was Indigenous and the groom was not. "Assuming some of the bride's family is coming," she asked, "do you think we should double the amount of communion wine we're going to have?"

Brokenleg responded that they should keep the amount of communion wine the same. "She meant no harm," Brokenleg told CoGS. But he suggested the story was an example of the systemic nature of racism, and how it can work separately from the intentions of those involved.

Ginny Doctor

Ginny Doctor said it felt "scary" to share her experiences with racism to CoGS. But she took comfort from that morning's gospel reading, John 15:18, in which Jesus says, "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you." That reading "stood out for me, because racism is about hate," Doctor said. Remembering her own experiences with racism and of other people hurt by it had been painful, she said.

The Indigenous Ministries coordinator described experiencing racism all her life, starting with her childhood on a reservation in upstate New York. She called reservations "racist acts of government" both in Canada and the United States: "As you drive into the reservation, you enter into a Third World country, because there was no running water, substandard housing." She grew up in a house with three rooms for nine people. The reservation land was "terrible"—rocky and not good for growing anything. Yet she also acknowledged its more positive qualities: the fields and forests where she could feel safe, learn new things and spend much of her time. Largely segregated from the outside, those living on the reservation did not leave often. However, they had to go off-reservation for school, which led to Doctor's first experience

with racism.

In 1993, Doctor became a missionary in The Episcopal Church and was sent to Alaska to work in native villages there. She described this as a time of discernment for herself and of listening and learning from the native Alaskans. Sent to a small village on the Yukon River, one of Doctor's first charges was to identify potential church leaders, create formation plans for them and help get them into the ordination process.

Doctor was invited to The Episcopal Church's General Convention in Indianapolis in 1994 to be part of a panel on racism. The night before, she saw a monument in the centre of downtown that said, "Indians defeated here in 1911." At the convention, she told her audience, "I'm still here and not defeated." But speaking to CoGS in 2021, Doctor said, "Today I feel defeated, because racism is still around and nothing has really changed since then to become an anti-racist loving community."

In Alaska, the biggest racism Doctor saw was in the ordination process. She found it difficult to get potential Indigenous church leaders trained as lay ministers. "To get them through the process was quite difficult because of canons and the way people interpreted them," she said. "They kept people out even though they weren't designed to keep people out." There were many "gatekeepers" at each point, she said. "But we persevered."

If National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald had not become bishop of Alaska in 1997, Doctor said, "there probably would not have been any ordinations of Indigenous people." During his tenure, there were 11 Indigenous ordinations, including Doctor's. But despite having gone through the process, their ordinations provoked a condescending reaction: "What I heard about that was 'Mark

MacDonald will ordain anyone,” Doctor recalled. She believed the whole process had kept people out and that there had not been another Indigenous ordination in Alaska since MacDonald left.

Doctor also described a “horrific” experience when ministers took young people from their villages to a diocesan youth event. “Our young people were not welcomed,” she said. “They were not wanted, and the adult leadership of the camp made that well-known. They were tormented and everything that went wrong in that camp was blamed on our young people.” She feared that real trouble would emerge and that some of the Indigenous youth might be “hailed off to jail for something they didn’t do.” Some partners at the camp stood in solidarity with them. That night, Doctor told the youth that she didn’t want them to leave the building because she wanted them to stay safe. She and another youth leader from Minnesota worked out an all-night vigil, looking out the window for anyone who might come to disturb them. “It was like we were under siege,” she remembered.

Finally, Doctor met with the adult leadership of the camp and asked them what they wanted of the Indigenous youth. They responded, “We want them out and want them out right now.” When Doctor asked if they knew what they were saying, they repeated their demand. Two Indigenous boys were present with her and she recalled an intense look of hurt on their faces. As the person responsible for their well-being, Doctor said they would leave. MacDonald heard about the episode and wanted the Indigenous campers to stay, so they did. Though the non-Indigenous adult leaders made an “attempt at reconciliation” at the closing service, Doctor said, “it was a futile attempt, because it wasn’t meant. So we left.” To this day, she remains in contact with many of those young people, “because that event bonded us together and

caused us to find strength we didn’t know we had.”

When she became Indigenous Ministries coordinator for the Anglican Church of Canada in 2012, one of Doctor’s responsibilities was again to raise up Indigenous leadership and get them trained. She encountered racism in the Canadian church, but described it as “almost a polite racism, because some people just don’t realize what they’re saying or doing.”

Doctor shared the story of a creche or nativity scene set up each year at Church House, which featured a white baby Jesus. “It always irked me and I always thought about it ... because we all know baby Jesus was not white,” she said. “Baby Jesus was a person of colour born in the Middle East.” Initially she tried to shrug it away. But one day she brought the creche to the attention of a colleague who initially didn’t notice anything out of the ordinary, but then realized what Doctor meant and said she was correct. He invited her to write a reflection on it and said he would do everything possible to get it published. “To my knowledge, it was never published,” she said. “But next year, there was no baby Jesus—no white baby Jesus, no creche at all.” Doctor asked: “How can we do things like that as a church when we are called through our baptismal covenant to respect dignity of every human being?”

She ended by sharing a recent dream. Indigenous people take dreams seriously, Doctor said often as messages from ancestors or the Creator. The dream had occurred days earlier as she was thinking about what she would say to CoGS. In the dream, Doctor went to her grandparents’ house during a blizzard. She took off her snowpants, but kept on a red coat, despite the fact that in real life, “I never wore a red coat.” She went into the kitchen where her grandmother was pulling some homemade bread out of the oven. Her

grandmother saw Doctor, smiled, hugged her and said, "I'm so sorry that our church has hurt you," adding with a whisper, "Forgive."

Doctor suggested different possible meanings for the dream. The red coat could represent an "armor of God" signifying the "red skin" that Indigenous people were associated with. It could represent the red dresses that have become a symbol of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. But she asked council members to "think about that dream and what it means, because it was an important message for me from my ancestors", her grandparents, who had both died in the 1980s.

Dion Lewis

A first-generation Canadian, Dion Lewis is the son of immigrants from Barbados. His mother grew up Pentecostal and moved to Canada in her early 20s. His father, a practicing Anglican, followed afterwards. The couple were married at an Anglican church in downtown Montreal. At this time, Lewis said, "You could count on one hand the number of Black families there." His father and mother both worked in manufacturing jobs.

Growing up, Lewis said, "my parents made sure that my brother and I always presented ourselves properly ... I was always told, 'Listen, child, you're Black. You have to make sure that you do the best or better than anybody else in order to get by.'" Before he and his brother ever left the house, his parents told them not to make themselves a "discussion topic" for anyone. "The consequences of not behaving properly were known and felt," he said.

Lewis spoke about being affected by subtle racism from some "very well-meaning people" in his own activities, which had caused him grief and pain. To this day, he often relies on being known directly by people before going into unknown spaces, or having the buffer of a

specific task to get done in that space, which he described as a coping mechanism. "I cannot help but notice when people start to relax when they recognize me," Lewis said. "I have used precious time and energy to be inoffensive in every public place I go to."

Subtle incidents of racism, he noted, can slowly erode trust and break down lines of communication and openness. "Being a valued member of the community does require a certain level of vulnerability," Lewis said. "Love is our greatest gift. But if we're called to clear a path for God, we all need to start levelling and clearing the path. Part of our shared task is not throwing obstacles in the place for other people." He shared two particular incidents in which he had inadvertently been the victim of a biased statement or action.

The first involved a choir practice. Music for Lewis has been the most powerful way for him to share his faith and encourage others to come to faith. He has grown to love teaching experiences through music. At choir rehearsals, singers receive instructions on interpretation, style, breathing and pronunciation. Care is taken to put the right emphasis on certain syllables and make the consonants clear.

This was the case when a choir Lewis was working with rehearsed Victorian and classical pieces. It was not the case, however, when the group performed a "Negro spiritual ... Then we were asked as a group to make it sound more primitive. 'Try to sound like that Black choir' or 'make the T's lazy.'" Lewis felt hurt by the different treatment accorded to the respective styles of music. "I kept on asking, 'Why is the same attention to detail not given to both types of music?'" He only felt empowered to request a change in adjectives after he had served as director of a community choir which specialized in that form of music.

Lewis experienced a similar feeling during a special vestry meeting a few years ago at Trinity Memorial Church, an Anglican church where his partner served as music director and organist, and which the diocese of Montreal closed in 2017. Trinity had served as the “mother church” or cathedral for much of the Black anglophone Caribbean community in Montreal—hosting Canada’s official memorial services for Jamaican and Barbadian heads of state, joint services welcoming Caribbean bishops and archbishops, and large funerals for Black community members. A non-profit food security organization ran operations in the basement and community groups met at the church. The regular congregation had been working hard to maintain the building, which had a capacity for 900 people. “People were finding comfort in a space where Black people there were able to remove the armor and be with each other and live a full life, and start to actually want to step out into the world and change the injustices that were happening,” Lewis said.

Financially, Trinity was not viable. At the special vestry meeting, questions arose about the possibility of allowing the congregation to continue, selling the building and redeveloping the property. That plan didn’t work out. The parish had much work to do to raise money. Members at the vestry meeting asked why there were not given a chance to sell the building and move somewhere else. Lewis asked the diocesan representative: “Why is there a rush to shut down for the parish and taking away our leadership and closing the building? How come other places that have closed had a dignified wind-down?” Another parishioner and former school principal asked a similar question. The diocesan representative answered: “You will address me with my title.” Lewis described the response as a “slap in the face”.

In fighting against racism, Lewis emphasized the importance not just of individual work, but of

sharing and learning from each other. “The message that we all are trying to communicate is a universal message,” he said. “But not everyone will hear and understand that message at the same time.”

Chung Yan Lam

A Lutheran pastor serving at an Anglican parish in Ottawa East, Chung Yan Lam grew up as the daughter of a pastor in Hong Kong. Her family immigrated to Canada when she was a child and moved to Saskatchewan, where many of their relatives lived. Her father served with the Chinese United Church in her community. In her two decades with the United Church, Lam was active from age 10 in a unit known as the Ethnic Ministries Council. Later, as a seminary student, she embraced Lutheranism.

Working with Asian communities in her ministry, Lam learned about anti-Asian racism throughout Canadian history: the internment of Japanese Canadians; the suffering of Chinese labourers building railroads; the struggle of Korean Canadians to fight for a voice and place in church. But she has also personally experienced subtle forms of racism in the church, such as people—including a bishop—telling her “Your English is so good.”

In some cases, Lam has seen a minimizing of racism or what was required to address it. Working with the Canadian Council of Churches as a Lutheran representative on the Mission of Faith and Witness, she began talking about racism in the church during discussions on a theme for the triennium. When she suggested a focus on dismantling racism, others countered by saying that “maybe we just need to talk about interpreting Scripture differently.”

Within the Anglican diocese of Ottawa, Lam recalled attending a clergy day on renewal of the gospel from Indigenous perspectives. Participating in a small group talking about

racism in the church, she brought up some of her own experiences. An older white clergyman looked at Lam—the only person of colour present—and said, “People of colour are just as racist as everybody else.” Recounting this story to CoGS, Lam noted, “I didn’t have the courage at that point—because I just started working and like my job—to tell him there’s no such thing as reverse racism.” Meanwhile, the rest of the group remained silent.

In the last few weeks, Lam recalled remarks by a parish leader during a discussion about finding local partners. “It’s all good to have partners in communities,” one parish leader had said then. “But we can’t let Aboriginal people into our churches and service on Sunday because it’ll change the integrity of the church—because they believe different things and they’re pagan.” Lam told CoGS if she did not have to stay in the room, she would have left. “As a person of colour, I needed to hear somebody in a privileged position stand up to that,” she said. Instead, she spent the next day and a half calling people herself to facilitate a conversation. Fears of facing professional repercussions for standing up to racism are a real concern, Lam indicated, noting a member of a youth group who recently left their job at a café after speaking up to their employer about racism.

Other experiences that Lam shared with CoGS included seeing depictions of a “white, blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus”, courtesy of a U.S. missionary in Hong Kong, and pushing back against weekly prayers for Queen Elizabeth II. “As a person from a colonized country, it was hard to sit through that,” she said. “I wanted to yell out, ‘Let’s pray for the colonized countries!’” Eventually she brought it up at council and suggested not praying for the Queen every week, or praying for other countries. “No one quite knew what the problem was,” Lam said. “I had to tell them.” She recounted her own

ordination, when graduates were allowed to design their own chasubles. Lam asked her worship professor for permission to include the Chinese character of her father’s family name on the chasuble. “Of course they said yes,” Lam said. “But the fact is that I felt I need to ask permission, and my colleagues didn’t. It’s that internalized oppression.”

Lam ended on a hopeful note about CoGS hearing the panel’s experiences would help efforts to fight racism. “The fact that you’re here to listen to those stories is hope that continues to bring me the table, because I do believe we are the generation to make that change.”

Council members broke into listening groups for 10 minutes, with different panel members in each. Rather than verbal explanations, Brokenleg asked members to focus on visual images they saw in their minds from hearing the stories and emotions they felt.

Afterwards, the council reconvened. Panel members shared brief conclusions they drew from their respective listening sessions. “We need to become a whole people, united by God and in the Holy Spirit ... We can’t be whole until we know our histories,” Doctor said. “Learn from our past mistakes and teach others to do better,” Lewis said. Lam offered the council a blessing, which she sang in Mandarin.

Archbishop and Primate Linda Nicholls thanked the panel members for sharing their stories. “You’ve given us a lot to think about, to reflect on, and continue to work on ... Thank you for your courage and your passion for a better vision of what God is calling us to do and be. May we have the courage to respond.”

Members took a 10-minute break.

Insight Sessions

Council split into breakout rooms for insight

sessions with two more speakers. Joseph Vecsi, director of Communications and Information Resources, and Scott Sharman, animator for ecumenical and interfaith relations, each discussed their respective General Synod ministry. CoGS members listened to the speakers for 20 minutes each.

Motion – Faith, Worship, and Ministry

Sharman presented a motion to council on trial use of the prayer for reconciliation with the Jewish people. He noted that General Synod 2019 had approved the first reading of a proposed replacement in the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Prayer for the Conversion of the Jews with a new Prayer for Reconciliation with the Jewish People. The proposed change will come back for a second reading at the next General Synod and Assembly in 2022.

The process thus far, Sharman said, has been a “good example of how God can take a delicate matter and turn it into something beautiful that we might not have expected.” He noted that the first reading of the new prayer had led to positive Christian-Jewish dialogue on its content, reaffirming mutual friendship and the efforts of Christians to reach out to their Jewish neighbours and push back against anti-Semitism. Sharman’s motion carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that this Council of General Synod authorize, for trial use and evaluation, the following contemporary language collect for Reconciliation with the Jewish People:

O GOD, who has chosen Israel to be your inheritance: Have mercy on us and forgive us for violence and wickedness against our brother Jacob; the arrogance of our hearts and minds has deceived us, and shame has covered our face. Take away all pride and prejudice in us,

and grant that we, together with the people you first made your own, may attain to the fullness of redemption which you have promised; to the honour and glory of your most holy Name. Amen.

Members took a 50-minute break for lunch.

Bible Study

Council members went into breakout rooms for Bible study. They read James 3:13-18, which concerns “wisdom above” and “wisdom below”, and reflected on a series of questions about the text.

Global Relations & Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice

Ryan Weston, lead animator of Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice, and Andrea Mann, director of Global Relations, presented on the church’s work to combat across Canada and around the world to combat human trafficking and modern slavery.

Weston began with background going back to the Anglican Consultative Council in 2012 and its resolution against the trafficking of persons, progressing through 2017 with a resolution by CoGS and national reference group, and continuing with the *Engage Freedom!* gatherings in each ecclesiastical province. In 2019, General Synod passed Resolution A204, which committed the church to take up the struggle against human trafficking at every level through education, advocacy, and building relationships with partners.

In the fall of 2020, the Anglican Church of Canada held its second national reference group, which focused on some core areas for the church’s work against trafficking: missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMWIG) and the exploitation of Indigenous Peoples; protecting and empowering youth to

eliminate trafficking and exploitation; and action and education for migrant justice and international solidarity.

Subsequent actions by the national church prioritized three main areas:

- Education. Freedom Sunday gatherings in February 2020 and 2021; presentations to diocesan leaders and events in Niagara, Yukon and Algoma; promoting education events, highlighting key dates
- Advocacy with government. Support for national hotline; pushing for the federal government to adopt Bill S-216, the *Modern Slavery Act*, which seeks to eliminate the use of slavery and child labour in the supply chain for goods produced in or imported into Canada; campaigns in support of migrant worker rights;
- Ecumenical collaboration on trafficking, migration and exploitation. Establishing Churches Witnessing With Migrants – Canada.

At the local and diocesan level, actions have included:

- Articles in diocesan publications;
- Synod sessions for raising awareness;
- Local partnerships with civil society groups and networks for marches and vigils;
- Advocacy with local government concerning exploitation of temporary foreign workers;
- Fundraising; and
- Designated diocesan staff

Next steps for the Anglican Church of Canada in its work to eradicate human trafficking and modern slavery include creating information and prayer resources for key times in the year:

specifically, National Indigenous Peoples' Month in June 2021 and 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence in November-December. In August, the National Youth Project will launch a new project focused on fighting human trafficking and slavery. Ongoing advocacy by the church will focus on vaccine access for migrant workers and continued support for the *Modern Slavery Act*, which as of March 30 is still being studied in a parliamentary committee.

Mann also directed the attention of CoGS to church partnerships at the international level, offering solidarity and funding to efforts to fight trafficking in different parts of the globe. These partners include the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa, Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, and Pacific Conference of Churches.

Strategic Planning Working Group

Council members broke into small groups for approximately 30 minutes to reflect on and discuss two questions from the Strategic Planning Working Group:

1. Imagine that you are at General Synod 2022 looking into the plenary all filled with tables and people, about to begin the strategic planning presentation and discussion. What do you think synod members will be:

- Expecting?
- Hoping?
- Fearing?

2. Given the transitional nature of our time, what will it be OK for synod members not to know? What is the tolerance for going forward with a strategic plan based on imperfect knowledge?

Primate Nicholls ended the day's business by leading members in a prayer. She drew the attention of council to Archbishop Maimbo Mndolwa, primate of the Anglican Church of

Tanzania, who was recently added to a list of targets for assassination by an Islamic militant group. Nicholls asked members to pray for Archbishop Mndolwa and for other Christian leaders in the region.

Council adjourned for the day at 4 p.m.