

# ***Reimagining the Church*** ***A Primate's Commission on Proclaiming the Gospel in the 21st Century***

## ***Behind the Hypotheses***

***Hypothesis: supposition made on limited evidence as a starting point for further investigation. (Oxford Dictionary)***

### **Why hypotheses?**

To enable wide engagement in a conversation about how structures can best enable the proclamation of the Gospel, the Primate's Commission has posited 7 hypotheses. These have been crafted to be deliberately provocative, thereby stimulating conversations in focus groups. After each conversation, participants will be sent a survey to complete and return. The Commission will analyse notes from the conversations and the survey data, reflect further and prepare a report to General Synod 2025 suggesting next steps in addressing church structures—governance, operations and finance.

Each of these hypotheses proposes a focussed consultation process, bringing together those most directly affected to consider the impact of making structural changes to enable a greater capacity within the church to proclaim the Gospel. Many of these hypotheses have been talked about informally for years; what's been missing has been a way to engage them more formally.

### **HYPOTHESIS #1**

**It is time to dismantle the colonial foundations of the Council of the North to fully “embrace mutual interdependence with the Indigenous church” (*Sacred Circle*).**

*What is being proposed here?*

A consultation to be convened with representatives of the Council of General Synod, Church House Management Team, leaders from the Sacred Circle, and the Council of the North to explore the Council's goals, intents, limitations, processes and reporting policies around the collection and redistribution of financial and non-financial resources and recommend changes.

*Why is this important?*

The largest proportionate expenditure within the budget of General Synod is Council of the North, and this will remain the case in spite of planned modest reductions over the coming years. Does this expense accomplish the work needed now to strengthen the proclamation of the Gospel? Could a creative conversation between the Council of the North and the Sacred Circle help propel the transformational aspiration to “embrace mutual interdependence with the Indigenous church”?

### *What's the history?*

The origin of the Council of the North traces back to 1970 as a way for the church nationally to respond to the challenges and opportunities for ministry in the northern parts of Canada. By 1976, the current structure was established; in the over 50 years since its inception there have been significant changes in church and society most especially in settler/Indigenous relationships. Since 2007 a National Indigenous Anglican Bishop (now Archbishop) has been set apart to oversee ministries to Indigenous Anglicans and their parishes and congregations across Canada. Many of these are in northern regions. Yet the Council of the North's membership is comprised of a majority of non-Indigenous bishops and does not include the National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop. In a colonial pattern, the bishops make financial decisions regarding the disbursement of funds collected nationally to fund ministries in northern regions of Canada.

### *Why has the Commission raised this question now?*

Members of the Commission are aware of many under-resourced and underserved communities across Canada not eligible for Council of the North funding from General Synod. A benefit of re-examining funding mechanisms to transfer money from well-resourced dioceses to challenged regions in Canada would be to open up the possibility of strengthening more parishes and congregations. Also, through the ongoing evolution of the Sacred Circle, funds could be made directly available for the strengthening of Indigenous ministries.

### *How does the Commission understand 'colonization'?*

Colonization is defined as systems and practices that "seek to impose the will of one people on another and to use the resources of the imposed people for the benefit of the imposer."<sup>1</sup> Among the five Transformational Commitments embraced by General Synod 2023<sup>2</sup> is "to champion the dignity of every human being; work to dismantle racism and colonialism."

### *How does this hypothesis relate to Governance, Operations/Structure and Finance?*

**Governance:** Council of the North's Terms of Reference are found in Appendix D in the *Handbook of General Synod*. Within its Terms of Reference, there is nothing about its reporting relationship. There is no reference specifically to the Council of the North within the Constitution of the General Synod.

**Operations:** While the Treasurer of the General Synod is connected with the Council in its deliberations regarding the distribution of money to the dioceses within the Council of the North, and while the Council of General Synod annually approves the Council's budget (as a line item within the total budget), there is little influence that can be brought to bear on the work of the Council beyond the bishops who comprise its membership.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.yorku.ca/edu/unleading/systems-of-oppression/coloniality-and-settler-colonialism/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://changingchurch.anglican.ca/genesis/>

## **HYPOTHESIS #2**

**It is time to dismantle the racism and colonialism that are built into our governance structures in order to diversify participation.**

*What is being proposed here?*

General Synod's Governance Working Group would be tasked to find ways to enable participation in General Synod regardless of factors such as age, cultural background, language, family situation, employment status, etc. Barriers to engagement and leadership opportunities are to be removed and proactive supports are to be developed.

*Why is this important?*

The structures of General Synod—a weeklong meeting every three years, plus Councils and Committees meeting in the Greater Toronto Area through work weeks – inhibit the participation of many who are not able to take time away from work or family responsibilities. Consequently, there is a disproportionate representation of retired individuals involved in General Synod governance. The Commission is supportive of the work of National Advisory Council on Dismantling Racism agreed to by the General Synod in 2023.

## **HYPOTHESIS #3**

**It is time to eliminate one level of structure—either General Synod or the Ecclesiastical Provinces.**

*What is being proposed here?*

A consultation to be convened with the Primate, the Metropolitans, and representatives from the Council of General Synod and provincial councils, to consider the elimination of either the Ecclesiastical Provinces or General Synod and/or a restructuring of responsibilities and resources between the two levels in order to more effectively support dioceses. Consideration should also be given to the possibility of amalgamating dioceses or otherwise increasing inter-diocesan collaboration in administration and governance.

*Why is this important?*

To maintain the many levels of governance structures within the Anglican Church of Canada--national, provincial, diocesan, deanery, parish—is costly not just financially but also in the time and energy that is given by bishops, clergy and lay leaders. If the goal is to strengthen the proclamation of the Gospel, it is necessary to ask whether it the best use of church resources is to maintain historic governance structures.

*How does this hypothesis relate to Governance, Operations/Structure and Finance?*

All three. The governance model of the Anglican Church of Canada—with its layers of General Synod, Ecclesiastical Provinces, Dioceses and Territories evolved through a period of the church’s expansion and growth. In this time of institutional decline, with its attendant financial pressures, the Commission wonders if the church is ‘over-governed’ and wants to encourage conversations to re-imagine the church so that its core purpose of proclaiming the Gospel can be supported more vigorously.

#### **HYPOTHESIS #4**

**It is time to examine returning to a model where the Primate is also a diocesan bishop.**

*What is being proposed here?*

General Synod officers will appoint a task force that gives serious consideration to the option of the office of the Primate being held by a diocesan bishop, including the possibility for some of the responsibilities of the Primate to be adapted and redistributed and for General Synod to provide financial support to that diocese for an assisting bishop. This could also involve a consideration of term limits for the office of Primate.

*Why has the Commission raised this question now?*

The debate at General Synod 2023 about the Canon on the Primacy revealed that there is not widespread consensus within the church about the role and function of the Primate. As questions are raised about reducing the levels of governance within the Anglican Church of Canada, the role of the Primate comes into play. The role of the Primate has long been discussed within the Canadian Church; the Commission wishes to bring this conversation forward and offer a transparent and thoughtful way for the church to discern the best way forward.

#### **HYPOTHESIS #5**

**It is time to (further) reduce travel and meeting costs, for both financial and environmental reasons.**

*What is being proposed here?*

General Synod Officers will initiate a thorough exploration of purpose, need, and cost-recovery/cost-sharing for in-person meetings. This includes a review of House of Bishops Meetings and the travel expectations of the Primate and other General Synod staff.

*Why is this important?*

While General Synod in-person meetings build community across the Canadian Church, bringing together regions and people from across the country, in an era with increased awareness of climate change, and in a time of revenue decline, the Commission believes that it’s time to take

another look at the assumptions about travel nationally. While the Commission is aware that the carbon footprint of streaming video and cloud computing is considerable, air travel is only one part of the costs and impact of in-person meetings. There are the costs of travel to and from airports, transportation to a meeting place, and the costs of accommodation and meals for the duration of the meeting.

## **HYPOTHESIS #6**

### **It is time to re-vision Church House.**

*What is being proposed here?*

General Synod officers and Council, in consultation with national staff representatives, will explore new models for the Office of the General Synod, including possibilities such as job-sharing, part-time staffing, and a move away from a central headquarters toward a fully remote and nationally dispersed workforce with the necessary technical support.

*Why is this important?*

New patterns of work are emerging that broaden the capacity of organizations to employ people from a variety of locations and in a variety of ways that do not depend on employees' ability to commute to offices in downtown locations. For the General Synod's Church House, finding ways to employ more people across the country could well enhance the reach of the work of General Synod, and attract candidates who might find moving to Toronto unaffordable or otherwise unappealing. While this model is already being explored within Church House, the Commission wants to test whether there is an appetite within the broader church to accelerate this.

*Where would the Primate meet dignitaries?*

If there was no physical General Synod Church House, the Primate could meet dignitaries in diocesan cathedrals in any of the regions of the country.

*Where would the archives reside?*

The Commission is aware of the importance of the General Synod archives and, if there is not a physical location of Church House, an alternate site for the archives to reside would need to be determined. Sharing archival facilities with a diocese or a province would be one option; another would be to find space within the archives of a theological college, university or diocese.

## **HYPOTHESIS #7**

### **It is time to end independent editorial journalism funded by General Synod.**

*What is being proposed here?*

For many years, the *Anglican Journal* has oscillated between journalistic integrity and the communication needs of the church nationally. These things have often been in conflict and incompatible. It may be time to choose one direction. Because the Commission has identified ‘communication’ as a key activity of the General Synod, whether there is a national newspaper or not, there does need to be a focus on telling the story of the church nationally but not seeking to cover it from a journalistic perspective. The General Synod does have an important role in creating and disseminating information and stories about the church, but a journalistic platform may no longer be the best way to exercise this ministry of General Synod.

*What is being proposed here?*

While the Commission is aware that the *Anglican Journal* is not in fact fully independent, it recommends a shift from the General Synod’s operation of a national print newspaper (with an online presence) to devoting time, staff and budget to the core work of the proclamation of the gospel. The 2022 financial statements show that the *Anglican Journal’s* expenditure as \$941,615. —the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest within the General Synod budget. But it needs to be noted that the *Anglican Journal* also has significant revenue sources, including its annual appeal. Nevertheless, there remains a significant outlay.