

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Friday, May 31, 2024

Members of the Council of General Synod (CoGS) gathered at 9 a.m. EDT at the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga, Ont.

Opening Eucharist

National CoGS held an opening worship service and Eucharist in the chapel.

Results of Email Votes

Deputy Prolocutor the Ven. Tanya Phibbs presented the results of two motions CoGS had passed via email since the last meeting. The first was in January and saw CoGS vote to appoint four members to the Lutheran-Anglican-Moravian Commission until General Synod 2025. The second approved and adopted terms of reference for the General Synod Planning Committee.

Primate's Report

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, said since the last CoGS meeting in November, she had visited the Territory of the People and the dioceses of Kootenay, Islands and Inlets, Athabasca, Brandon, Ottawa, Montreal and Huron.

Nicholls had attended the Anglican Primates' Meeting in Rome, during which she and other primates of the Anglican Communion met with Pope Francis at the Vatican on May 2. The pope had invited questions from the floor. "It's clear that he has a warm friendship with the Archbishop of Canterbury and he was very welcome to us as the primates," Nicholls said. She offered an update on ecumenical dialogue through the Anglican-Roman Catholic

International Dialogue (ARCIC), having been a member for many years. Nicholls attended ARCIC's most recent meeting in Strasbourg, France. She said the dialogue was working on a final document and hoped to conclude its work next year.

Closer to home, the primate had met with the board of the Anglican Foundation of Canada and attended the synod of the ecclesiastical province of Rupert's Land, which on June 1 officially changed its name to the ecclesiastical province of the Northern Lights. Nicholls said the new moniker represented the geography, people and experience of this part of Canada, which stretches from the Prairies to the Arctic, as well as the metaphorical nature of being the light of Christ. The primate said it was a joy to attend the provincial synod and the vote to adopt the Northern Lights name. "When the vote came in unanimously, everyone just cheered and cheered," she said.

The primate had attended a meeting of the House of Bishops at the Mount Carmel Spiritual Centre that began on April 8, the same day as a total solar eclipse. In her journeys across the church, Nicholls said, while she had seen many concerns and struggles from Anglicans, in every diocese she saw members focused on the central transformational commitment made at General Synod, of "inviting and deepening life in Christ." Some are using existing programs, such as Alpha or Cursillo. But all are working on deepening the formation of existing church members and inviting others in. Nicholls had met non-stipendiary and voluntary clergy and

lay leaders giving time to the church and helping needy neighbours.

Touching on justice work, Nicholls highlighted advocacy around current events in Israel-Palestine, following the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas and Israel's assault on Gaza. When General Synod in the summer of 2023 passed its motion calling for peace and justice in Israel and Palestine, she said, it had no idea what the area would be facing in the coming months. "It has been incredibly painful to watch what is happening," the primate said. She displayed a new painting by Bishop of Central Newfoundland John Watton portraying the devastation of Gaza.

The primate said while the church has no direct influence on the government of Israel, it does have influence on its own government in Canada, which has been the impetus for participation in Gaza ceasefire pilgrimages with other churches. "We continue to be in a conversation with our government about how the influence that it may have might be brought to bear to bring about a ceasefire, the release of the hostages, an end to the war, the provision of humanitarian aid and somewhere in this, a solution to this intractable problem that seems to just keep recurring," Nicholls said.

Members took a break from 10:15 to 10:45 a.m.

Engaging the Diaconate

Dean Emerita Ansley Tucker, director of deacons in the Anglican diocese of Islands and Inlets, and Canon Maylanne Maybee, a deacon in the diocese of Montreal and the longest-serving deacon in the Anglican Church of Canada, presented a report on the Diaconate Writing Group, of which they are both members.

Anglican Deacons Canada established the writing group in 2023 following consultation

with Faith, Worship and Ministry. The Diaconate Writing Group's mandate is to produce a brief theological statement on the theology and ministry of the diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada for adoption by General Synod in 2025, as well as a range of recommended best practices stemming from this statement that General Synod will commend to dioceses.

Tucker and Maybee presented short videos of three deacons across Canada introducing themselves and their various ministries. These included Canon Claudette Taylor, permanent deacon at Epiphany and St. Mark Anglican Church, who serves as an ambassador of reconciliation in the diocese of Toronto; Maybee, who has served as a deacon for 46 years and worked as an educator, theologian and in urban ministry; and the Rev. Jeffrey Preiss, deacon at Christ Church Cathedral in the diocese of New Westminster and director of development and communications at the Crisis Centre of B.C., which focuses on mental health support and suicide prevention.

Members broke for lunch from noon to 1:15 p.m.

Liturgical Advisory Committee

The Rev. Dr. Eileen Scully, director of Faith, Worship and Ministry, directed CoGS to surveys designed by the Liturgical Advisory Committee around liturgical experience, practice, worship and leadership across the church. These includes surveys designed respectively for bishops, diocesan executive officers, parish leaders and cathedral deans. She asked CoGS members to each find time to do their respective surveys.

Primate's Commission

The deputy prolocutor presented a motion to move to an *in camera* (private) session in order to discuss the work of the Primate's Commission tasked with reviewing church structures. "Any discussions about the future of

the church and particularly of General Synod may touch on matters that directly affect the staff of General Synod who are present with us today,” Phibbs said. “They may be unsettling for the staff to hear and difficult for people to speak openly about with the staff present.”

CoGS adopted the motion and moved to an *in camera* session for council members only—making an exception for Archbishop Anne Germond, who will become acting primate in September after Nicholls retires.

Members broke from 2:45 to 3 p.m.

Bible Study

The Rev. Carrie Irwin, chaplain to CoGS, led members in Bible study focusing on 1 Samuel 1:1-20. The passage tells the story of Hannah, one of two wives of Elkanah. Hannah is childless and prays to God for a son, eventually giving birth to Samuel.

Financial Update and Audited Statements

Amal Attia, treasurer and CFO of General Synod, presented the Financial Management Committee report and audited financial statements. Total revenue for General Synod in 2023 was \$9.4 million. In terms of expenses, the church had budgeted for slightly over \$11 million, but came in slightly lower at \$10.6 million. The resulting deficit before transfers was \$1.2 million. However, with \$1.6 million in transfers from reserves, investment and depreciation, General Synod was left with an overall surplus of \$391,000.

Proportional giving from dioceses had experienced a steep decline over the years, with Attia presenting a graph going back to 1998. After a period of stability from 2014 to 2017, giving had seen a straight drop down. During a discussion, the primate said the rapid plummet in proportional giving had been accelerated by COVID and changes in dioceses. There had

been a delay in feeling the impact, Nicholls said, because many dioceses and parishes had the support of government funds during the pandemic. However, this funding had now completely stopped and Anglicans had had a full year of trying to get back to regular activities in parishes. “Parishes can’t give what they once gave to dioceses,” the primate said. “Dioceses can’t give what they once gave to the national church.”

Work on the budget would start now and be presented to CoGS for its approval in November, Nicholls said. She said CoGS needed to form a process for thinking about options before then, whether for increasing revenue or decreasing expenditures. Attia presented two motions to CoGS related to finances, which passed.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approve the audited Consolidated Financial Statements of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada for the year ended December 31, 2023, including the net transfer of \$914,621 from Unrestricted Net Assets to Internally Designated Net Assets.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approve the audited financial statements of the Anglican Church of Canada Consolidated Trust Fund for the year ended December 31, 2023.

Pension Committee

Rekha Menon, executive director of the Pension Committee, and General Synod Pension Plan trustee Bob Boeckner presented three motions

related to pensions. All carried.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approves the recommendation of the Pension Committee to provide a 3% increase to all active members, inactive members, and retired members effective July 1, 2024, in respect of accrued pensions as of December 31, 2023.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approves the recommendations of the Pension Committee to amend Schedule A of the Regulations of Canon VIII by adding Section 13 as follows: [text of amendment on bonus addition to accrued pensions as of December 31, 2023.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approves the recommendations of the Pension Committee to amend Schedule A of the Regulations of Canon VIII by adding Section 13 as follows: [text of amendment on bonus addition to accrued pensions as of December 31, 2023.

Resolution

Be it resolved that the Council of General Synod approve the recommendation of the Pension Committee for the amendment of Section 1.6 of Regulations of Canon VIII as follows [text of amendment].

Members broke for hospitality and dinner from 5 to 7 p.m.

Planning and Agenda Team Terms of Reference

Phibbs introduced a motion for new terms of reference for the Planning and Agenda Team, which carried.

Resolution

That this Council of General Synod approve and adopt the revised Terms of Reference for the Planning and Agenda Team.

Strategic Planning Implementation Group Terms of Reference

General Secretary Alan Perry introduced terms of reference for the Strategic Planning Implementation Group. A motion to adopt the terms carried.

Resolution

That this Council of General Synod approve and adopt the Terms of Reference for the Strategic Planning Implementation Group.

Reflections on the Primacy 2019-2024

Canon (lay) Ian Alexander facilitated a session in which CoGS members were invited to ask Nicholls questions reflecting on her primacy as she prepares to retire. Nicholls said she felt better about retirement the closer it approached. When travelling, the primate said, she is surprised how often people bring up her online ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic and that it gave them a sense of connection and hope. She highlighted the work of the Strategic Planning Working Group during her primacy and saw the five transformational commitments being lived into. The five transformational commitments would be at the

centre of the church's work going forward, she said, while the Primate's Commission would have an impact on what structures of the national church will look like.

Nicholls thought the House of Bishops had worked hard on its relationships over the years, in particular learning how to live with difference. Her experience coming out of General Synod 2023 was very difficult, Nicholls said. The following autumn, the House of Bishops had done reflection without her present and then asked how General Synod had affected her, personally and vocationally. In a private conversation with the bishops, Nicholls said she had provided honest reflection in response. At the end of that day, the House of Bishops took time to say farewell, which Nicholls described as very moving.

Asked about the role of a primate and what qualities should be sought for someone in that office, Nicholls said the primate of the Anglican Church of Canada is unique in the wider Anglican Communion, since the primate does not have a diocese and must act for the whole church. "When the primate turns up somewhere, people feel like they've been visited by the rest of the church," Nicholls said. "I have always found that a joy and delight and surprise when I turn up and people are so grateful that the rest of the church cares and is there with them. The primate carries the stories of one part of the church to another part of the church." Aside from embodying the church's presence in a way that has nothing to do with them as an individual, Nicholls said, the primate must have the ability to write quickly: writing sermons, letters to government, columns for the *Anglican Journal* and so forth.

On whether she had any regrets from her primacy, Nicholls cited unfinished business such as not being able to complete the apology on behalf of the Anglican Church of Canada to

survivors of Ralph Rowe, a priest and Scout leader who abused hundreds of Indigenous boys. A class-action lawsuit recently reached a settlement and included as one of its stipulations that the primate would make an apology to survivors. "We've been working on how that apology can be best made to be meaningful and appropriate," Nicholls said. A meeting would be held soon with some survivors. However, the primate said she trusted in her successor to complete unfinished work.

Nicholls spoke about the role of women in the church and her own status as the first female primate of the Anglican Church of Canada. She noted that women had moved steadily into leadership roles since the Canadian church allowed the ordination of women in 1976. Across the Communion as a whole, she found even those opposed to the ordination of women were polite and respectful. The primate spoke about working ecumenically with many other women leaders such as Carmen Lansdowne, moderator of the United Church of Canada, and National Bishop Susan Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. When Nicholls has found herself in conflict with others, she said, she attributed that not to gender but to a difference of views which hopefully they could talk about.

Finally, Nicholls said that it had been a wonderful privilege as primate to be a guest of Indigenous Anglicans at Sacred Circle. "When I'm there, I'm very aware that I come as a settler, I come as someone who has been invited," the primate said. "My role there is to listen and to learn, and to carry the story of that Sacred Circle to others who may not have that privilege of being there." She expressed admiration for the Covenant and Our Way of Life in how they centre the gospel and said she was honoured by the respect Indigenous people give the primate in Canada even though the church has been responsible for much pain. She regretted

not being able to visit Indigenous communities as much as she would have liked during her primacy, in part due to COVID.

Evening Prayer

Irwin led CoGS in evening closing prayer.

Council adjourned for the day and held an evening social from 9 to 11 p.m.