

COGS Highlights



Council of General Synod

Sunday, November 10, 2024

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

Remembrance Sunday

Council opened with a song and prayer offered by a member of CoGS in the Shona language and an Act of Remembrance in anticipation of Remembrance Day.

Partner Reflection #1

The Rev. Chris Bishopp, representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) to CoGS, began his partner reflection by praising the “seamless” transition between Archbishop Linda Nicholls as Primate and Archbishop Anne Germond as Acting Primate, which he called a credit to work behind the scenes as well as to Archbishop Germond.

Discussion at CoGS regarding the Primate’s Commission on Reimagining the Church and its hypotheses reminded Bishopp of his own past work as a member of the ELCIC’s structural renewal task force. In his experience, it was not easy to reach major transformational commitments on the one hand, and to be hemmed in by constraints on the other. Bishopp recalled the dictum, “The Church is always reforming itself.” It is the cost of the church to be continually remade, he said. “This can come to a cost to us when our beloved structures fade away, but this can also be a source of hope.”

Bishopp appreciated the language of “hypotheses” used by the Primate’s

Commission: as the son of an economist, he grew up hearing a lot about hypotheses. The process of testing hypotheses requires putting forward an idea and then turning a critical eye to it. “At the end, we’re just collecting information,” Bishopp said. “And if it turns out the church does in fact reject a certain hypothesis, then actually that just means we’ve done our job right and we’re able to keep moving on.” However the process runs, he added, it is important to remember this work is done under the auspices of God and the Holy Spirit.

Another parallel Bishopp saw between Anglicans and Lutherans as full communion partners is that weeks after the Anglican Church of Canada holds its General Synod and elects a new primate in June 2025, the ELCIC will hold its own National Convention, where it will elect a new national bishop. In January, the ELCIC will begin its process of discernment across the church where Lutherans will submit nominees for national bishop. The ELCIC also plans to elect three new synod bishops.

Continued growth and evolution in Indigenous Anglican expression, Bishopp said, was marvelous to see and hear and something the ELCIC could benefit from as a partner church. He also saw hope in the expression of Black Anglicans and was glad Black Anglicans of Canada had reached out to his “brother from seminary days” Bishop Ali Tote of the Saskatchewan Synod ELCIC, who he said would be a wonderful partner. Bishopp prayed that as the two churches walked together, that

expression of Black Anglicans could also be one of Black Lutherans. It was no accident, he said, that one of the largest churches in the Lutheran World Federation is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. He concluded by thanking CoGS for the way it weaved worship into its meeting patterns, and for the opportunity to be with council and pray with them in times ahead.

Partner Reflection #2

The Rev. Canon Murray Still, representative of CoGS to The Episcopal Church (TEC) in the United States, said Episcopalians have written materials expressing concern about results of the recent U.S. presidential election. He read out a message to the church from members of TEC's executive council, who held their first meeting of the triennium shortly after Republican candidate Donald Trump defeated Democratic candidate Kamala Harris.

Executive council said emotions ran the gamut. A few members were quietly pleased at the election results, while most were upset. They strove to remember the need to respect the dignity of all human beings and to hold a "relational jubilee", noting that the way in which they treat each other can be a testament to the Good News in Christ. Nevertheless, not all members were willing to let go of their anger. Some members of colour felt that doing so was "a return to white people telling them to get over something." Executive council acknowledged that rage can be a weapon and urged members to turn that rage against injustice.

Canon Still said it remained a joy to be able to worship with TEC. When he worshipped with Episcopalians, liturgy was in English on one side and in Spanish on the other side, and he enjoyed seeing the diversity in Canada of languages reflected back. At its 81st General Convention in June, TEC elected Sean Rowe as

its new Presiding Bishop. His nine-year term begins Nov. 1.

A major commitment of TEC going forward is racial justice, truth-telling and healing, Canon Still said. The church's latest General Convention asked for a task force, overseen by the executive council, to look into reparations over the displacement of Indigenous people as well as chattel slavery. Reparations are to be funded from TEC assets. "They're taking a serious look at reparations for Indigenous people and peoples of colour and it makes my heart soar to know that they're beginning that work," Canon Still said. When he spoke about ongoing work in Canada with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous people in TEC said they would love to hear more because they have not started the work there.

General Secretary's Report

General Secretary the Ven. Alan Perry began his report by describing the process of moving to a new city, during which he aims to learn more about the community by reading newspapers and hearing about local culture and what politicians are saying. He continually reads about social problems and people calling for more funding for education, poverty reduction, housing and health care. Again and again, Archdeacon Perry said, politicians will say that there is not enough money. He heard this even in Alberta, the richest province in Canada.

Archdeacon Perry showed CoGS an image slide of a glass with water in it. Many people would see this glass as half-empty, he said. "That kind of rhetoric is everywhere in our society." Politicians will claim poverty until they want to spend money, he said, such as Ontario Premier Doug Ford sending \$200 cheques to every person in Ontario. "Sometimes I think we are so formed by rhetoric around us of not having enough—that's that kind of pessimism that will kill us," Archdeacon Perry said.

The General Secretary put forward a different suggestion. "Faith says the glass is half-full," he said. "And we can do something with that half a glass of water: to make a real difference, to take our church forward, to take our society forward, perhaps. But we need that rhetoric of faith and hope constantly informing us, not the rhetoric of pessimism and defeatism."

"Jesus said that the gates of hell will never prevail against the church," Archdeacon Perry added. "Never. A half-empty glass will not prevail against the church. A half-full glass will help the church engage in its mission." He encouraged CoGS members as they prepared to return home to remember that the glass is half full and that this is more than enough—truly believing that "the power of God can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine," in the words of the doxology prayer, even if they don't fully trust it.

Taking It Home

Table groups spent 10 minutes in discussion thinking about key messages from CoGS that they would take back to their own dioceses, provinces, parishes and local contexts. Among the responses they shared:

- Communicating real sense of hope we felt this weekend
- Getting back to basics of church
- Initiating more contact with Indigenous groups in our dioceses
- Making sure transformational commitments are a priority
- Youth involvement is necessary for church to look at
- Forward movement—putting what we've done here into action
- Inclusiveness and welcoming
- Reconnecting dioceses and provinces to national body
- Support for Indigenous self-

determination within church

- Digitization process will help us communicate our stories
- Build on networking done here
- Synod means "together on the way"—synodality as a way of being collegial, dialogical and provisional. Bringing positive, hopeful spirit to prepare colleagues for General Synod next summer knowing what we do is provisional, but ensuring it will be dialogical and provisional, not confrontational.

Closing Remarks

Closing her first CoGS meeting, the Acting Primate thanked members for the way in which they had engaged in the business, worship and fellowship of the meeting. She concluded by paraphrasing a Gandhi quote but reversing the meaning: "I like your Christ," Archbishop Germond said. "But I really like your Christians, because your Christians are so much like your Christ."

Council adjourned at 10:15 a.m.

Eucharist

CoGS members held a closing Eucharist in the chapel.